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Forgiveness and Transitional Justice in the Czech Republic

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This article examines major theoretical assumptions about forgiveness by victims of human rights abuses in the context of transitional justice in the Czech Republic. The authors hypothesize that forgiveness is facilitated by restoring equality between victims and perpetrators, namely: individual, social and political empowerment of victims; decreasing the superior position of perpetrators, especially through their punishment; and a repentant gesture of perpetrators towards victims, especially by apologizing. The results of path analysis confirm that religious belief, individual, social, and political empowerment, punishment, and apology directly promote forgiveness. This enables the authors to distinguish four types of forgiveness: religious, reparatory, retributive, and reconciliatory forgiveness. They suggest that policy interventions that promote forgiveness may not be mutually exclusive as often proposed in the dilemmas of transitional justice.

Keywords: transitional justice; forgiveness; victims; Czech Republic

Forgiveness has entered the political domain where there is a need to ameliorate historical injustices, overcome political scandals, and facilitate democratic transition. On the eve of the twenty-first century, Pope John Paul II asked for forgiveness for his church’s treatment of Jews, women, and native peoples; President Clinton asked for forgiveness from his family, Monica Lewinski, and the American people; and the South African political transition endorsed the principle of “no future without forgiveness.” This article focuses on the third context, examining the major theoretical assumptions behind forgiveness of victims of human rights abuses during the process of political transition in the Czech Republic.

Forgiveness is defined here as a negation or abandonment of vengeance (Arendt 1958, 240-1; Murphy 2003, 13-6; Shriver 1995, 8; Minow 1998; Worthington 2001,

AUTHORS’ NOTE: This article uses the term victims, which, in sources that we quote, is more common than survivors. Our study only concerns direct victims. It does not cover the immediate families of victims.

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Forgiveness helps to overcome interhuman alienation and repair fractured human relations (Shriver 1995; Hampton 1988, 86). In the macro-political context, forgiveness is championed as a means to peace and national reconciliation in the aftermath of political conflicts (Minow 1998; Borain 2000; Tutu 1999, 206-30). Forgiveness is said to benefit victims, perpetrators, and divided societies. It can end cycles of violence, help victims reestablish their own dignity, redeem wrongdoers as persons worthy of forgiveness, renew civic relationships between victims and perpetrators, and allow bystanders to realize their own roles in the past (Minow 1998). Forgiveness helps societies to overcome, though not forget, the past (Biggar 2003) and thus make possible progress to the future (Tutu 1999, 226). A strong case for forgiveness comes from experiments using the prisoner’s dilemma, which showed that generous strategies (“nice and forgiving”) were more effective in noisy environments than other strategies (including “tit-for-tat” strategies) (Bendor, Kramer, and Stout 1991, 696-7). By forgiving their opponents, players can often prevent the conflict from escalating (Exline and Baumeister 2000).

However, policy interventions, or even therapies, that promote forgiveness may be harmful to victims (Herman 1997; Pargament, McCullough, and Thoresen 2000; Murphy 1988, 15-24; Exline and Baumeister 2000). This dualism is mirrored in diverging claims in transitional justice. Victims’ needs are sometimes used to justify criminal trials (Roht-Arriaza 1995, 19-21; cf. Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 592-5) and sometimes serve as an argument against trials and/or for the establishment of a truth commission (Asmal, Asmal, and Roberts 1997, 19; Tutu 1999, 24-36, 128; Hayner 2001, 133-53). Some argue for a victim-centered approach to transitional justice (Biggar 2003; Hamber 2003), while others warn that fulfilling victims’ claims, however morally justified, threatens the political transition (Malamud-Goti 1996, 13).

We are interested in victims for the following reasons: we believe that victims and, by their attitudes, the entire society will benefit from ending the cycles of violence and the reestablishment of order and that the forgiveness that comes from victims of human rights abuses is crucial to this goal in two respects. First, victims are the only ones with the natural right to forgive (Sachs 1993; Asmal, Asmal, and Roberts 1997, 49; Villa-Vicencio 2000). Second, the victims’ forgiveness can reduce the desire for

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1. According to Arendt (1958, 240-1), “Forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance, which acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing. . . . Forgiving . . . is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew.” Murphy (2003, 16) defines forgiveness as “the overcoming” of “the vindictive passions—the passions of anger, resentment, and even hatred that are often occasioned when one has been deeply wronged by another.” According to Worthington (2001 163), “Forgiveness is a juxtaposition or superposition of a strong positive emotion over the cold emotions of unforgiveness. . . . Alternatively, forgiveness is the emotional replacement of hot anger and fear by those positive emotions. The positive emotions can be empathy for the perpetrator, compassion, agape love, or even romantic love.”

2. Forgiveness may restore relationships but at the expense of victims’ dignity and self-respect (Murphy 1988, 17-8). It may result in fear that the transgression will be repeated; feelings of weakness, unfairness, and injustice; and the loss of the benefits of victim status (Exline and Baumeister 2000, 143-7). We do not underestimate these reservations, nor do we suggest sacrificing victims for political objectives; we seek to determine whether and how forgiveness can be arranged in accordance with achieving viable peace.

3. As Murphy (1988, 21) explains, “I do not have standing to resent or forgive you unless I have myself been the victim of your wrongdoing. . . . It would be ludicrous for me, for example, to claim that I had decided to forgive Hitler for what he did to the Jews.”
retribution among colleagues, cohorts, and others from the victims’ side of the conflict. Although no one can forgive on behalf of victims, other people can take revenge on their behalf, especially if they share a strong identity with them (e.g., national, gender, or communal). The voice of Nelson Mandela, one of the longest serving prisoners of apartheid, is a case in point (cf. Villa-Vicencio 2003, 32-3). His forgiveness quenched the flames of revenge in his political allies. The question is what policies of dealing with the past, if any, and what factors lead to victims’ forgiveness?

Policy interventions that promote forgiveness in divided societies are controversial. The global acclaim of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has convinced many scholars that perpetrators’ revelations of truth, apologies, restitution, and contacts with their victims are the best ways of achieving forgiveness from the victims (TRC 1998, vol. 5, chap. 9, para. 3; Minow 1998; Tutu 1999; Borain 2000). Other scholars are more cautious and see truth commissions not as an alternative to trials but as a complementary mechanism (Crocker 2000; Hayner 2001; Shriver 2003) or as part of a broader policy of social reconstruction (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002; David and Choi 2005). However, the ability of truth commissions to deliver reconciliation and forgiveness has been questioned (Holiday 1998, 46). Truth may reopen past wounds (cf. Villa-Vicencio 2003, 34), and truth commissions may harm the victims (Biko 2000, 197; Simpson 2002, 240). Some scholars of transitional justice therefore support prosecutions, trials, and punishments as established institutions that demonstrate equality before the law and spread the human rights culture (Orentlicher 1991; Roht-Arriaza 1995). Judicial condemnation of wrongdoers, it is argued, provides victims with closure and facilitates their healing (Lyster 2000, 187). It can redress the imbalance between the former adversaries (in which one has suffered harm and the other not) and thus help resolve the past conflict (Murphy 2003; cf. Bennett 2003).

Does exposing the truth, apologizing, and facing perpetrators lead to forgiveness? Are trials compatible with forgiveness? Does punishment of perpetrators facilitate or discourage forgiveness? These are empirical questions that have not been sufficiently explored.4 This article fills the gap by testing theories about the major factors associated with forgiveness. It reviews the literature in transitional justice and related fields. This enables us to formulate hypotheses concerning policy interventions that are said to facilitate or inhibit forgiveness. Specifically, we examine (1) whether forgiveness is facilitated by the victims’ rehabilitation, financial compensation, social acknowledgment, and political empowerment; (2) whether punishment of perpetrators is associated with forgiveness; and (3) whether an apology from perpetrators makes victims more willing to forgive.

To test our hypotheses, in 2000 we conducted a survey of former political prisoners in the Czech Republic. The Czech policy of dealing with the past went further than in other postcommunist countries. It consisted of several mechanisms for addressing the plight of the victims, dealing with the perpetrators and collaborators, and dealing with the needs of society at large. It included the reparation and rehabilitation of

4. There is a lack of empirical studies of forgiveness in the context of transitional justice, perhaps owing to religious connotations of the term (cf. Arendt 1958, 238-9). The exceptional empirical scholarship on reconciliation was conducted by Gibson and others (see, e.g., Gibson 2004; Gibson and Gouws 2003).
victims, the restitution of confiscated property, the extension of the statute of limitations to enable the prosecution of communist crimes, the establishment of the Office for Documentation and Prosecution of Communist Crimes, and the exclusion of former leading cadres, secret police members, and their collaborators from public administration under the so-called lustration law (David 2003, 2004).

THEORIES AND HYPOTHESES

Forgiveness in the context of transitional justice differs from other types of forgiveness because of the nature of the past crimes and the multiple dimensions of their consequences. As a direct consequence of crime, victims suffer physically and psychologically. Moreover, wrongdoings are messages—symbolic communications. “They are ways a wrongdoer has of saying to us, ‘I count but you do not,’ . . . ‘I am here up high and you are there down below’. . . . Intentional wrongdoings insult us and attempt to degrade us—they involve a kind of injury that is not merely tangible and sensible” (Murphy 1988, 25). Human rights abuses carry a politically symbolic dimension (Danieli 1995; Becker et al. 1990; MacKinnon 1993; David and Choi 2005). They project the existing power relationships in the oppressive regime onto victims, who suffer their political and social status. They cause multiple inequalities between victims and perpetrators. Without first addressing these inequalities, forgiveness may project a lack of self-respect of the forgiver (Murphy 1988).5 Despite its unhealthy and even dangerous dimension, resentment that results from these injuries has a positive function, primarily as a defense of victims’ self-value (Murphy 1988, 16; cf. Simpson 2002).6 Forgiveness may undermine this self-protective mechanism and further weaken victims.

Forgiveness therefore requires eliminating inequalities between victims and perpetrators. For victims’ ability to forgive requires a relatively high level of power.7 Yet victims who are wronged often lack such power; perpetrators of political violence often enjoy impunity and show no remorse. If their crimes have a degrading effect on victims and forgiveness requires power, in order for victims to forgive, the following three dimensions must be addressed: (1) empowering victims, (2) downgrading perpetrators, and (3) restoring the balance in their civic relationship.

EMPOWERMENT OF VICTIMS

The first step to victims’ forgiveness is their reparation and empowerment. Forgiveness requires improvement of victims’ lowered status and regaining their confidence in their own worth despite the immoral action challenging it (Hampton

5. It may also reveal a lack of respect for wrongdoers as responsible moral agents and for the rules of morality (Murphy 1988, 19, 24).
6. “Expressions of anger and the desire for revenge (rather than forgiveness) might in fact have done more to effect the sort of recovery that enables ‘victims’ to redefine themselves as ‘survivors’” (Simpson 2002, 240).
7. It is always more difficult to forgive a powerful person than a relatively powerless one. This is because the former is assumed to possess knowledge and resources, whereas the latter can be excused for his or her ignorance (ForgivenessNet n.d.).
1988, 83; Murphy 1988, 27). The multiple consequences of crime demand victims’ empowerment at the individual, social, and political levels (David and Choi 2005).

**Individual empowerment.** van Boven (1996) and Bassiouni (2000) argue that reparation of victims in postconflict countries can only be achieved through the mechanisms of restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation. Restitution restores victims to their original situation before the violations occurred, such as restoration of their liberty, legal rights, social status, employment, and property. Rehabilitation includes medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services. Compensation addresses any economically assessable damage (van Boven 1996; Bassiouni 2000). Without these interventions, victims may not be sufficiently empowered to face and eventually forgive their perpetrators.

**Hypothesis 1.1:** Individual empowerment of victims facilitates forgiveness.

**Social empowerment.** It is the nature of human beings that our worth is validated by others (Murphy 1988). The self-perception of our value is derived from how others value us. Therefore, the sympathy of society is necessary for victims to overcome their feelings of isolation and stigmatization. Moreover, suffering that results from political contexts is often not confined to the events of persecution but extends to the suppression of victims’ experiences of victimization (Danieli 1995, 573). Thus, the damage done involves not just the persecution of victims but also the suppression of their experiences of victimization.

Forgiveness requires recognizing that a debt has been incurred (Exline and Baumeister 2000, 145). Social acknowledgment reflects the understanding of society of the past. It validates the human dignity of victims and recognizes their suffering. Sympathy and acceptance from society and community helps to dispel victims’ stigmatization and put social pressure on perpetrators (David and Choi 2005). Social acknowledgment therefore helps victims to establish their humanity, dignity, and sense of self; empowers them; and helps them to reconnect with the outside world, which may in turn promote forgiveness (Herman 1997, 214-7). Based on the above discussions, we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.2:** Social empowerment of victims facilitates forgiveness.

**Political empowerment.** Suffering that results from political contexts often carries a symbolic dimension that tends to divide people between those who count and those who do not. Moreover, political transformation is often entwined with the identity of victims, many of whom have been involved in political projects to end the oppressive system. Successful institutional reform and a sustained process of democratization vindicate the
value of their convictions and rebuild the part of the self that the repressive regime destroyed (Becker et al. 1990; David and Choi 2005). The establishment of equality before the law, universal suffrage, and equal rights unequivocally demonstrates the end of divisive practices. This represents the fourth dimension of van Boven’s (1996) and Bassiouni’s (2000) principles, “satisfaction and guarantees of nonrepetition,” which requires changes at the institutional level. Political empowerment is therefore hypothesized to be a component of victims’ empowerment. Therefore, it facilitates forgiveness.

Hypothesis 1.3: Political empowerment of victims facilitates forgiveness.

PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS

Punishment is often viewed as an obstacle to forgiveness (see Calhoun 1992, 85; Shaffer 2001, 321-39; cf. McCall Smith 2001, 59). Some scholars of transitional justice assert that punishment represents victims’ retributive desires, which are not compatible with forgiveness and hence with peace. The idea is embodied in the postamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993), which provides a foundation for the South African amnesty process. The former head of the South African TRC’s research unit, Villa-Vicencio, claims that the assertion of the dignity and the worth of victims does not necessarily require the imprisonment of the perpetrator (Villa-Vicencio 2003, 40). If forgiveness involves the cancellation of a debt, which victims are entitled to collect, the debt should also involve the cancellation of punishment. Forgiveness and amnesty are viewed as mutually reinforcing (Schaap 2003, 78).

Other scholars view the absence of punishment as an obstacle to forgiveness. Lyster (2000, 187) argues that the foregoing of punishment creates “a vacuum that can easily be filled with potentially explosive emotions of anger, bitterness and resentment, with detrimental effects for both victims and society at large.” Cullinan (2001, 27) suggests that the absence of sanctions against perpetrators may cause “a second injury” to victims, creating additional anxiety and prolonging psychopathological consequences of repression. For this reason, the needs of victims are cited as one of the justifications for trials (Malamud-Goti 1990; Huntington 1991, 68-9; Bassiouni 1996, 26; Kritz 1996, 128). In other words, the absence of punishment exacerbates the superior status of perpetrators and retraumatizes victims, constituting an obstacle to forgiveness.

Likewise, some scholars argue that punishment is compatible with forgiveness (Shriver 1995, 7-8). If a perpetrator is punished, he or she suffers as the victim has suffered and the imbalance is redressed; punishment may thus facilitate the victim’s forgiveness (Murphy 2003). Bennett (2003, 68, 74) suggests that punishment may work as an institutional act of contrition, and it is punishment, not amnesty, that may lead to reconciliation and forgiveness. Moreover, punishment may also have an indirect effect on
the forgiveness given by victims. The imposition of punishment presumes the existence of an external power, willing to denounce past injustice and punish perpetrators. This irrevocably demonstrates that political change has occurred and that society’s legal, political, and moral order acknowledges the worth of victims. In other words, punishment may also promote forgiveness via its impact on political empowerment.

In sum, there are conflicting views about the relationship between punishment and forgiveness. Some argue that punishment inhibits forgiveness, whereas others claim that punishment facilitates forgiveness. Based on our framework of inequalities, we hypothesize that punishment is an enabling rather than an inhibiting factor of forgiveness because it degrades the status of perpetrators and reduces the status inequalities between them and their victims:

_Hypothesis 2:_ Punishment of perpetrators facilitates forgiveness.

**APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS**

Augustine ([426] 1993, 14/6) said, “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.” A sinner remains psychologically identified with the sin, unless he or she breaks the identification through repentance (Murphy 2003, 80). “A person who apologizes and asks for forgiveness . . . is seeking, in effect, to separate his character and future actions from his past wrongs” (Govier 2002, 46-7). By apologizing and showing remorse, perpetrators undo the symbolic meaning of the injury, reestablishing “the balance of power” with the victim. Perpetrators in effect ask victims to respect them as human beings (Hampton 1988; Murphy 1988) and “recognize their status as morally human” (Halpern and Weinstein 2004). Thus, an apology may enable the victims to reevaluate the wrongdoer as a decent person, with whom a renewed civic relationship is possible (Hampton 1988, 83). Psychological research on forgiveness corroborates this argument by showing that people are more likely to forgive perpetrators who apologize (Exline and Baumeister 2000, 136-9).

Yet in some situations, apologies may have no effect on forgiveness or be counterproductive. Murphy (2003) warns against apologies arising from coercion or other external incentives. For example, some apartheid victims questioned the sincerity of apologies they received from perpetrators during the South African truth and reconciliation process (Biko 2000; Jurgens 1999). Others challenge the link between apologies and forgiveness altogether. The chairman of the TRC questioned the promotion of apologies as a necessary condition for forgiveness. If the victim could forgive only after the culprit confessed, then the victim would be “locked into the culprit’s whim, locked into victimhood” (Tutu 1999, 220). The need to avoid this danger is shared by some psychologists. “An offended person who refuses to forgive until certain contingencies are met suffers twice: once in the original offense and again as he or she is obligated to retain resentment. . . . To forgive, then, is to show self-respect” (Enright 1996, 109).

12. Exline and Baumeister (2000, 137) also suggest that expressions of unconditional forgiveness may promote repentance of perpetrators. This may, in turn, contribute to the satisfaction of victims.
In sum, according to Murphy (1988) and Hampton (1988), forgiving without apology may reveal a lack of self-respect on the part of victims. Enright (1996) argues the contrary: forgiving without apology may show victims’ self-respect. We resolve these two competing discourses, linking apology and forgiveness by testing the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Apology of perpetrators to victims facilitates forgiveness.

THE CZECH POLICY OF DEALING WITH THE PAST

In this section, we review (1) rehabilitation and sociopolitical acknowledgment of victims, (2) actions taken against perpetrators, and (3) apology to victims in the post-communist Czech Republic and evaluate their impact on the empowerment of victims, downgrading of perpetrators, and elimination of status inequality between them.13

INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF VICTIMS

Shortly after the fall of communism,14 political prisoners were released, the leading role of the Communist Party was abolished, the repressive provisions of the penal code were abrogated, and repressive organs were dissolved (David and Choi 2005). The axis of the reparation policy was the Act on Extra-Judicial Rehabilitation (Act No. 119/1990 Sb.). Parliament abrogated judicial decisions and ensured the reopening of disputable cases related to acts contravening the principles of democracy and human rights.15 The act also cancelled decisions that expelled students and dismissed employees for political reasons. Financial compensation was paid to surviving victims or the heirs of those who were executed or died in detention.16 However, some political...
prisoners were critical of the provisions because former secret police received more generous compensation for their forced retirement than they had (David 2004).

Property that was nationalized from 1948 to 1989 was returned to the individuals or their heirs based on the Act on Judicial Rehabilitation (Act No. 87/1991 Sb.). However, this has led to many disputes between the claimants and the property’s administrators (cooperatives, town halls), who were reluctant to implement the law. The returned property was often encumbered by legal obligations (e.g., toward tenants whose lease could not be terminated without a landlord’s arrangement of comparable accommodation).

The Czech Republic did not establish a truth commission. The truth about past oppression was revealed mainly by the media and facilitated through access to the secret police files (Act No. 140/1996 Sb.). However, the act was a disappointment to many political ex-prisoners because the names of those who informed on them were blacked out. In 1995, the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of Communist Crimes was established to replace its less effective predecessor that had been working since the early 1990s. Its tasks included investigation, data gathering, and the analysis of activities related to the injustices of the past regime and the resistance against it.\footnote{See http://www.mvcr.cz/policie/udv/english/index.html.}

Social acknowledgment of previous oppression was delivered through parliamentary acts and government activities. First, the Act on the Illegitimacy of the Communist Regime (Act No. 198/1993 Sb.) acknowledged the illegitimacy of the old regime and honored acts of resistance against it. This act bore enormous symbolic meaning for ex-political prisoners. It became their manifesto and was framed and displayed in their organizations, on public boards, and on their Web sites. In addition, some former political prisoners received state honors or were invited by President Havel to Prague Castle in appreciation for their past sacrifices, while a few others were acknowledged by town halls (but cf. David 2003, 420 n.78).

**POLICY AGAINST PERPETRATORS**

The prosecution of political crimes, for which most perpetrators enjoyed impunity during communism, has been a major failure in the effort to deal with the past. The impunity conferred by existing criminal law was reduced by the new Act on the Lawlessness of the Communist Regime, which extended the statute of limitations for crimes that had not been prosecuted for political reasons. It enabled the prosecution of communist crimes by the existing laws without violating the prohibition on retroactivity (Judgment of the Constitutional Court 1993). Furthermore, the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism was set up to support state prosecution. These measures, however, resulted in a dismal number of prosecutions and criminal trials. By June 30, 2000, only eight perpetrators were found guilty, and five of them received suspended sentences (Office for the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism 2000). The failure reflects a combination of structural obstacles in legal, institutional, and personnel continuity
with the past. Moreover, ideological constraints stemming from the peaceful nature of the Velvet Revolution weakened the political will to prosecute during the initial period of transition.

Although only a few perpetrators were convicted, the introduction of the so-called lustration law was viewed by some opponents and proponents as a form of punishment. The law either disqualified or demoted high-ranking Communist cadres, secret police members, and their collaborators from senior posts in the new administration and security forces (David 2003, 2004).

APOLOGY

The Communist Party issued no significant public apology for the human rights violations committed during the past regime. The Party has conceded a few unfortunate aberrations and human errors but omitted their structural and systematic features. This does not amount to apology. “To apologize is to declare voluntarily that one has no excuse, defence, justification or explanation for an action (or inaction)” (Tavuchis 1991, 17). The victims of communism are naturally angered by the Party’s defiant denial.

No public forum similar to the South African amnesty committee was established in the Czech Republic. Victims and perpetrators did occasionally meet on an informal basis. A few of these meetings resulted in apologies and a renewed civic relationship between victims and perpetrators. Yet more meetings ended in increased hostility. Many victims complained that their perpetrators showed no remorse (e.g., behaved in an arrogant way; David and Choi 2005).

DATA

In 2000, we designed and conducted a cross-sectional survey of former political prisoners associated with the Confederation of Political Prisoners (KPV) and the Association of Former Political Prisoners (SBPV) in the Czech Republic. The members of these organizations\(^\text{18}\) comprised about two-thirds\(^\text{19}\) of the total number of about 7,800 former political prisoners in the country in January 2000 (Drobny 2000, based on the data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs). It was not possible to gain access to the remaining one-third because the Ministry of Labor and

\(^{18}\) The KPV comprises the majority of former political prisoners. The Association of Former Political Prisoners (SBPV) has about 200 members. However, not all ex-prisoners are members of these organizations.

\(^{19}\) We estimate the number at between 4,500 and 5,000. The exact number is unknown for various reasons. First, the organizations, according to their members, “are gradually dying out.” Indeed, in 1968, the predecessor organization K231 comprised more than 100,000 former political prisoners. By 1990, the number dropped to about 10,000. By 2000, the membership halved. Second, many of the members are old. They may suffer from serious diseases that prevent them from participating in activities of the organizations or attending the annual meetings. Third, those imprisoned for less than one year are not entitled to free public transport, which inhibits their attendance at annual meetings, where the stamps for free transport are distributed. On the other hand, stamps for free transport motivate many others to attend the meeting.
Social Affairs is not allowed to disclose their identities. Cooperation with both organizations enabled a full sampling frame: all the members of the organizations received a self-administered questionnaire when they attended annual meetings at their local branches. Because organizational infrastructure of the KPV and SBPV is reliable, and because there is nearly 100 percent literacy in the Czech Republic, this method of gathering responses was the cheapest and most practicable. The questionnaire was piloted among 18 political prisoners.

Of all the questionnaires distributed, 826 were returned. The response rate, calculated as a percentage of the estimated number of association members (i.e., 826/4,500), was 18.35 percent. Yet this calculation has grossly understated the readiness to respond because those who did not attend the meetings were not given the questionnaire. Sickness and old age might have deterred political ex-prisoners from attending the annual meetings. The attendance rate for those who were incarcerated for less than twelve months might also be lower because they were not given yearly vouchers for free transport in the meeting. Sensitivity analyses were conducted to study whether findings would change if the data set were modified by (1) randomly deleting 20 percent of respondents, (2) deleting the oldest 10 percent of respondents (which tests effects of not including the oldest cohort), and (3) deleting those whose length of imprisonment was shorter than twelve months (which tests effects of not including those with shorter length of imprisonment) (for results of the sensitivity analysis, see below).

Many respondents enclosed comments on the research, detailed accounts of their personal sufferings, and provided pictures. This showed their enthusiasm for the research and their desire to share their experiences. Data from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS. Cross-checking of data input was conducted to ensure correct data entry. In addition, fourteen oral in-depth interviews and eighteen correspondence interviews with former political prisoners were conducted. We received ten letters, twenty-four enclosures to the questionnaires, and numerous comments in the questionnaires. Other sources of data included observations at the KPV meetings at district and national levels, informal meetings with prisoners, and reviews of bulletins published by both organizations—namely, Zpravodaj (Newsletter) of the KPV and Verní zustali (Faithful We Stayed) of the SBPV.

The quantitative data allowed the testing of hypotheses about the factors that contributed to forgiveness, whereas the qualitative data contained narrative accounts detailing the discourse of forgiveness, as well as its meaning and significance for individuals. The qualitative data provide an interpretative framework and allow us to contextualize the results of quantitative analysis.

VARIABLES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

In our article, we study forgiveness of victims of human rights violations as an interpersonal process, in the sense that it is “directed at the wrongdoer” (Hampton
1988, 85), an expression of victims’ attitudes toward the transgressor. Unlike the interpretation of forgiveness applied in psychological research, we do not study forgiveness as an intrapersonal phenomenon of overcoming resentments and other negative feelings toward perpetrators (cf. Worthington, Sandage, and Berry 2000, 229; McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen 2000, 9). We do not use any special diagnostic techniques to determine the sincerity of the expression that would establish, for example, whether forgiveness was genuine, whether it was complete, or whether it is still conditional, and so on. As Dzur and Wertheimer (2002, 12) argued,

When one says “I do” at a wedding ceremony, one is not making a statement about one’s intentions or one’s attitudes. Rather, one is agreeing to be married, and one’s agreement has legal and moral status that is independent of one’s inner thoughts. Similarly, if O asks for forgiveness and V expresses forgiveness, then, forgiveness . . . has occurred, whatever the parties’ inner thoughts.

When a victim answered that he or she had forgiven the perpetrators, then forgiveness had occurred for the purpose of our research. Our first indicator of forgiveness thus asked, “Have you forgiven anyone who wronged you in the past?” Responses were delineated into three categories: “no” (scored 0), “don’t know” (scored 1), and “yes” (scored 2). Fifty-two percent of the respondents (369 respondents) said that they had not forgiven their perpetrators, 6 percent (42 respondents) did not know, and 42 percent (297 respondents) said that they had forgiven a wrongdoer.

PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Individual empowerment (hypothesis 1.1) was indicated by a composite scale, which consisted of three questionnaire items corresponding to the three mechanisms of reparation (i.e., restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation) as suggested by van Boven (1996) and Bassiouni (2000). The three items were as follows: (1) “Do you feel that you have been rehabilitated?” (2) “Have you overcome the physical and psychological consequences of your imprisonment?” and (3) “Was the amount of financial compensation in the framework of reparation sufficient?” All three items had five response categories: “definitely yes” (scored 4), “rather yes” (scored 3), “do not know” (scored 2), “rather no” (scored 1), and “definitely no” (scored 0). Scores of these three items were summed to form the scale of individual empowerment, which ranged from 0 to 12. Higher scores indicated a higher level of individual
empowerment. The mean score of individual empowerment was 4.7, with a standard deviation of 3.05. The (Cronbach) alpha value of the scale was 0.66.

Social empowerment (hypothesis 1.2) may occur as a result of the activities of actors at different levels of society. At the more public level, there may be public truth telling, for example, through the media. Different levels of the new government may grant awards or extend invitations to honor the sacrifice and struggle of ex-political prisoners, thus empowering them socially. Yet these more public forms of acknowledgment often concern only a group of so-called celebrity victims, who may have more incentive not to forgive. Selected as spokespeople for the oppressed and the carriers of the collective memory, the fame and social role of these celebrity victims may be threatened by forgiveness. For this reason, although we included questions on public truth telling and invitations to ex-political prisoners by different levels of the new democratic state in our survey, we used the perception of neighbors as an indicator of social empowerment in this study. Respect by neighbors reflects social acknowledgment at the micro and private levels that may affect most respondents. Moreover, given their old age and immobility, the neighborhood may constitute the major domain of daily activities for the majority of ailing ex-political prisoners. The perception of neighbors will thus have an important impact on their social empowerment. The questionnaire item asked, “How do your neighbors perceive you?” The indicator had six response categories: “think highly” (scored 5), “normally” (scored 4), “not sure” (scored 3), “don’t care” (scored 2), “still suspicious” (scored 1), and “dislike” (scored 0). Less than 1 percent (0.6 percent) of our respondents reported that their neighbors disliked them, nearly 5 percent said that their neighbors were still suspicious of them, and 16 percent reported that their neighbors did not care. Four percent of respondents were not sure about the perception of their neighbors toward them, 62 percent said that their neighbors treated them normally, and 13 percent said that their neighbors thought highly of them.

Political empowerment (hypothesis 1.3) was conceptualized as having a meaningful role in the process of democratization. It includes such activities as voting, participating in a political party or a civic organization, and holding an elected position in such an organization. It was measured by three questionnaire items: whether the respondent (1) voted in the last election, (2) participated in a political party or a civic organization, and (3) held an elected position in such an organization. The three items had two response categories: “yes” (scored 1) and “no” (scored 0). Voting, membership of a civic organization, and holding a position in a civic organization may not reflect the same level of political empowerment. We therefore weighted these three components by using factor analysis and took the first factor score as a weighted sum of political empowerment.

Punishment (hypothesis 2) was measured by asking respondents, “Were any of the people who wronged you in the past condemned?” This variable had two response categories: “yes” (scored 1) and “no” (scored 0). Those who answered “don’t know” to the question were not included in the analysis. Four percent of the respondents said that their wrongdoers were punished.

Apology (hypothesis 3) was indicated by a questionnaire item: “Did anybody who wronged you in the past apologize?” Responses were delineated into categories: (1) “yes” (scored 1) and (2) “no” (scored 0). Four percent of the respondents had received an apology from a wrongdoer.
In addition to their direct effects on forgiveness, some variables were hypothesized to exert indirect effects on forgiveness via other variables. Social empowerment was hypothesized to affect forgiveness via its impact on individual and political empowerment. Recognition by neighbors may help victims overcome the psychological consequences of their imprisonment. Receiving social acknowledgment and respect from society may provide ex-prisoners with more confidence to play a role in the process of democratization, thus facilitating their political participation, resulting in enhanced political empowerment. Furthermore, social empowerment was hypothesized to have an indirect effect on forgiveness via apology. Social acknowledgment may increase social pressure on wrongdoers to apologize to victims.

We also controlled for the frequency of church visits, which served as an indicator of commitment to Christian belief. The Bible sometimes teaches believers to forgive unconditionally (Matthew 18.21-35), and hence the frequency may exert a direct effect on forgiveness. Moreover, a person is supposed to forgive sinners to be forgiven for his or her sins by God (Luke 11.4). Research also shows that religious people are more likely to forgive (Worthington, Sandage, and Berry 2000, 241-2). Aside from its direct effect, we also hypothesized that the frequency of church visits exerts an indirect effect on forgiveness via individual, social, and political empowerment. Religious commitment may enhance the community standing of victims among their neighbors. Support from the religious community may help victims overcome the psychological consequences of their imprisonment and torture, thus empowering them individually. The social network of the religious community may also facilitate political participation of victims, for example, through membership in Christian political parties, thus empowering them politically.

The variable “frequency of church attendance” had the following categories: “priest/chaplain/church functionaries” (scored 6), “more than once a week” (scored 5), “once a week” (scored 4), “less than once a week/irregular” (scored 3), “on Christian holidays” (scored 2), “do not attend” (scored 1), and “not a believer” (scored 0). Only 16 percent of our respondents reported not having any religious belief. The majority (70 percent) were Roman Catholics, 5 percent belonged to the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, and another 5 percent belonged to the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. In terms of frequency of church attendance, 2 percent were priests/chaplains/church functionaries, 8 percent visited the church more than once a week, 23 percent visited the church once a week, 21 percent visited the church less than once a week/irregularly, and 6 percent visited the church on Christian holidays.

Finally, we controlled for the length of imprisonment and for the experience of torture, both were indicators of the severity of human rights abuse. Respondents

23. Torture took place mainly during the 1950s. Antonin Huvar (1999), a priest, recalls his experience during his imprisonment: “We were lucky to be the first. They did not know how to torture us yet. Except those from [Uherske] Hradiste, Grebenicek’s people were already torturing. They beat us on our feet, three people for three days. Anyway, after the seventh hit by blow from a stick I lost consciousness. Nobody could survive this as a hero. Everybody was broken. . . . [Even] young people were dying in there [camps]. Fathers who had little kids who visited them four years later, bold, wearing a prison uniform, saw their kids run away from them. They [prisoners] became mad of this.”
Figure 1: Hypothesized Path Model

- Inhibits
- Facilitates

Forgiveness

Punishment

Political empowerment

Apology

Individual empowerment

Social empowerment

Length of imprisonment

Torture

Frequent churchgoers
were asked to report their length of imprisonment (measured in months) and whether they were tortured while in prison: “yes” (scored 1) and “no” (scored 0). The mean length of imprisonment was sixty-three months. Nearly half of our respondents (48 percent) reported being tortured while in prison. We hypothesized negative and indirect effects of these two variables on forgiveness via individual, social, and political empowerment. Figure 1 shows the interrelationships between our independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS

Zero-order correlations. We first examined the zero-order correlations among the predictor variables and the dependent variable. Table 1 shows the correlation matrix of the variables.

All the predictor variables, except length of imprisonment, were found to have significant relationships with forgiveness. Frequency of church attendance yields the highest correlation with forgiveness \((r = 0.261; p < .01)\), followed by apology \((r = 0.166; p < .01)\), individual empowerment \((r = 0.136; p < .01)\), social acknowledgment \((r = 0.117; p < .01)\), political empowerment \((r = 0.102; p < .01)\), tortured \((r = -0.095; p < .01)\), and punishment \((r = 0.091; p < .01)\). Except tortured, which is negatively correlated with forgiveness, all other variables are positively correlated with forgiveness.

In addition to being significantly related to forgiveness, frequency of church attendance is also positively correlated with political empowerment \((r = 0.171; p < .01)\). Apart from being correlated with forgiveness and frequency of church attendance, political empowerment is also positively correlated with social empowerment \((r = 0.076; p < .05)\).

Besides being significantly related to forgiveness, individual empowerment is also positively correlated with social empowerment \((r = 0.158; p < .01)\) and negatively correlated with the experience of torture \((r = -0.323; p < .01)\) and length of imprisonment \((r = -0.213; p < .01)\). Besides being significantly related to forgiveness, punishment is positively correlated with torture \((r = 0.076; p < .01)\). Length of imprisonment, although not significantly related to forgiveness, is correlated with torture \((r = 0.303, p < .01)\) and individual empowerment \((r = -0.213, p < .01)\).

Path analysis. Bivariate correlations only show the gross effects of various predictor variables on the dependent variable. To further examine the direct effect, indirect effect, and spurious effect of each of the predictor variables on the dependent variable, path analysis making use of ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regressions was performed. Table 2 gives the regression results.

Path coefficients were estimated as standardized partial regression coefficients. Several multiple regressions were performed with reference to the hypothesized causal directions of the variables shown in Figure 1 (see above). First, forgiveness was regressed on all other variables. Second, political empowerment was regressed on all other variables except punishment and apology. Third, individual empowerment was
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tortured</th>
<th>Length of Imprisonment</th>
<th>Frequency of Church Attendance</th>
<th>Social Empowerment</th>
<th>Individual Empowerment</th>
<th>Political Empowerment</th>
<th>Apology</th>
<th>Punishment</th>
<th>Forgiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tortured</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.303**</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>-0.323**</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
<td>0.076*</td>
<td>-0.095**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of imprisonment</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>-0.213**</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of church attendance</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.171**</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>0.261**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political empowerment</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Forgiveness</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.
regressed on length of imprisonment, tortured, frequency of church attendance, and social empowerment. Fourth, social empowerment was regressed on length of imprisonment, torture, and frequency of church attendance.

Previous bivariate correlations indicated that forgiveness was significantly related to all the predictor variables except length of imprisonment. After controlling for other variables, only six of the eight predictor variables were significantly associated with forgiveness. The variables that exerted a significant and direct effect on forgiveness included frequency of church attendance ($\beta = 0.246$), apology ($\beta = 0.157$), social empowerment ($\beta = 0.105$), individual empowerment ($\beta = 0.079$), and political empowerment ($\beta = 0.07$). All six variables were positively associated with forgiveness, suggesting that they all facilitated forgiveness.

In addition to having a direct effect on forgiveness, frequency of church attendance also exerted indirect effects on forgiveness via increasing political empowerment ($\beta = 0.146$). Likewise, besides having a direct effect on forgiveness, social empowerment also exerted an indirect effect on forgiveness via increasing individual empowerment ($\beta = 0.151$).

There was no path directly linking length of imprisonment and forgiveness. Yet length of imprisonment had two indirect paths going to forgiveness via individual empowerment ($\beta = -0.128$) and political empowerment ($\beta = -0.083$). Although torture did not have a direct effect on forgiveness, it had an indirect effect via individual empowerment ($\beta = -0.274$). The final path model showing significant causal paths is presented in Figure 2.

### Table 2: Standardized Partial Regression Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Forgiveness</th>
<th>Political Empowerment</th>
<th>Individual Empowerment</th>
<th>Social Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of imprisonment</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>-0.083**</td>
<td>-0.128***</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortured</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>-0.274***</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of church</td>
<td>0.246***</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social empowerment</td>
<td>0.105**</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.151***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual empowerment</td>
<td>0.079*</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political empowerment</td>
<td>0.070*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>0.157***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td>0.101**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple $R^2$</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>13.625***</td>
<td>5.419***</td>
<td>29.412***</td>
<td>1.555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
Figure 2: Significant Path Model

Key:
- Length of imprisonment
- Individual empowerment
- Political empowerment
- Apology
- Social empowerment
- Torture
- Frequent churchgoers

Significant Path Coefficients:
- Length of imprisonment to Individual empowerment: 0.151
- Length of imprisonment to Political empowerment: -0.274
- Individual empowerment to Political empowerment: 0.146
- Political empowerment to Apology: 0.147
- Political empowerment to Social empowerment: 0.157
- Apology to Forgiveness: 0.079
- Social empowerment to Forgiveness: 0.101
To further identify and compare the effects of the predictor variables on forgiveness, the direct, indirect, and total effects of these variables are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, frequency of church attendance had the strongest effect on forgiveness (0.256), followed by apology (0.157), social empowerment (0.117), punishment (0.101), individual empowerment (0.079), and political empowerment (0.07). Of the total effect of frequency of church attendance on forgiveness, about 96 percent (0.246) was direct effect and 4 percent was indirect effect (0.01). Of the total effect of social empowerment on forgiveness, about 90 percent (0.105) was direct effect and 10 percent (0.012) was indirect effect.

Both length of imprisonment and torture had a negative and indirect effect on forgiveness. Yet the magnitudes of the effects were very small. The total effect of length of imprisonment on forgiveness was –0.016, and that of torture on forgiveness was –0.022.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Direct Effect</th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th>Total Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of imprisonment</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>–0.016</td>
<td>–0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortured</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>–0.022</td>
<td>–0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of church attendance</td>
<td>0.246</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social empowerment</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual empowerment</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political empowerment</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sensitivity analysis. We have conducted sensitivity analyses within three of the reduced data sets: those with (1) random deletion of 20 percent of the cases, (2) deletion of the oldest 10 percent of the respondents, and (3) deletion of respondents whose length of imprisonment was shorter than twelve months. Some ex-prisoners, most likely the oldest and those whose length of imprisonment was shorter than twelve months, may have been excluded from the survey because they may not have attended the annual meetings at which the questionnaires were administered. The former may have been unable to attend the meetings due to health reasons, while the latter may not have had the economic incentive because they were not entitled to receive annual free transport vouchers.

The results were generally similar to those in the entire data set (results for the sensitivity analyses available from the authors). In the first reduced data set (random deletion of 20 percent of cases), frequency of church attendance, social empowerment, punishment, and apology remained significantly associated with forgiveness after controlling for all other variables. In the second reduced data set (deletion of the oldest 10 percent of respondents), variables that were found to be significant in the entire data set were also found to be significant in the reduced set with the exception
of individual empowerment. In the third reduced data set (deletion of respondents whose imprisonment was shorter than twelve months), variables that were found to be significantly associated with forgiveness in the entire data set remained significant with the exception of individual empowerment ($p = .06$) and political empowerment.

We do not have any individual-level characteristics about nonrespondents that would enable us to weight cases to correct for at least some bias that may have arisen from data collection. For this reason, caution should be used when making generalizations about the entire population of political prisoners. Nevertheless, the similarity of results between entire date sets and reduced data sets suggests that the relationships between the predictor variables and the dependent variables are robust. Moreover, the sensitivity analysis suggests that the findings are stable even if some ex-prisoners may have been excluded from the survey because they did not attend the annual meetings at which the questionnaires were administered.

**DISCUSSION**

To encapsulate the findings, multivariate analyses show that individual empowerment (hypothesis 1.1), social empowerment (hypothesis 1.2), political empowerment (hypothesis 1.3), punishment (hypothesis 2), apology (hypothesis 3), and the frequency of church attendance have significant direct effects on forgiveness. How do they facilitate forgiveness? The following section delineates the dynamic of these relations by using our qualitative data.

**INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT AND FORGIVENESS**

In accordance with our first hypothesis, individual empowerment was found to facilitate forgiveness. Victims who continue to suffer the economic and health consequences of imprisonment often find it hard to forgive their wrongdoers. Moreover, without successful reparation and rehabilitation of victims, past divisions between perpetrators and victims will persist. In fact, many victims use former members of the repressive apparatus as their reference group. They are critical of the fact that former oppressors who were dismissed from office received higher compensation than they themselves did for their suffering. It was commonplace for them to feel that their former oppressors received a better deal with respect to pension and health benefits:

- The government should . . . transfer each political prisoner . . . to a first pension category, [the category of the members of StB [secret police] and SNB [police]. (respondent 119)

- Prison wardens who tortured us were dismissed at the beginning of the 1990s with compensation of not less than 100,000 korunas and adequately high pensions, while their victims continue to suffer at the breadline. (respondent 185)

The above quotations suggest that factors contributing to individual empowerment are assessed in comparison with the socioeconomic status of former oppressors. Criticism against reparation and rehabilitation revolves around the government’s
inabilities to reduce inequalities between perpetrators and victims. Thus, we have also found qualitative evidence that individual empowerment is bolstered by the reduction of inequalities and the restoration of balanced relationships.

**SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND FORGIVENESS**

The findings support our hypothesis that social empowerment facilitates forgiveness at the micro level. The more positive the attitude of neighbors toward victims, the more likely the victim is to forgive. Historical divides often permeate neighborly relationships in transitional societies, as vividly captured by the title of the book *My Neighbor, My Enemy* on community reconstruction in Yugoslavia and Rwanda (Stover and Weinstein 2005). Many of our respondents pointed out that persecution of the past was largely carried out by rank-and-file members of the Communist Party who were very likely to live in victims’ neighborhood:

The dirtiest work was done by little “house trustees” and members of factory organizations who decided whose children could continue their studies, who could travel abroad, and who would be promoted at work. They controlled the lives of all people. (respondent 23)

The positive attitude of neighbors toward the victim is therefore an important first step toward reconciliation. It indicates recognition of past wrongdoings and signifies repentance. As the following respondent put it, “Those who were guilty have died and their children feel guilty.” The positive attitude of neighbors also put an end to social marginalization, isolation, and stigmatization caused by political persecution. Unfortunately, not all neighbors have had a positive attitude toward victims. Twenty percent of our respondents complained that their neighbors remained negative toward them. The typical answer of our respondents is that “noncommunists behave decently, communists inimically” (respondent 185). Without a change of heart, past divisions, manifested in political affiliation, continue to jeopardize reconciliation.

**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND FORGIVENESS**

For former political prisoners, politics is an extremely important part of their lives and identities. They were imprisoned and persecuted for their political opinions and became, as respondent 588 wrote, “second-class members of human society in Czechoslovakia.” Many have remained politically active after the revolution of 1989. About 36 percent are members of a political party or an association of interest, and almost all of them (about 92 percent) made an effort to vote in the last parliamentary election, despite their physical frailty and old age. If they cannot participate themselves, they think that parties and state institutions should make use of their fellow members: “There are still many clever people among us and their knowledge could be utilized at least by employing them as advisors, consultants, etc.” (respondent 24). For them, political is personal. The process of democratization, we have found, is an institutional manifestation of justice and a validation of their sacrifices. Having a meaningful role to play in this process empowers them and facilitates forgiveness.
PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS

For many victims, the power to forgive requires a peace of mind and heart that can be achieved when they feel that justice has been done. Thus, instead of being an obstacle to forgiveness, punishment was found to facilitate it. A few victims expressed the view that punishment and forgiveness are compatible:

I do not have a vengeful mentality but I require a just punishment. (respondent 677)

Crime has to be called crime [in the first place], condemned and then, in case of regret, old age or disease, it is possible to pardon further punishment. (enclosure of respondent 63)

Punishment represents justice and, for some, brings closure to old wounds. Punishment signifies the new government’s recognition of past wrongdoings and its willingness to take action to address them. The absence of punishment, on the contrary, fuels new resentment and frustrations, often associated with a lack of forgiveness and reconciliation. Many of our respondents were frustrated with the slow progress of prosecuting communist crimes:

Do you know anyone who was condemned for communist crimes? I do not. . . . None of the political prisoners wants the [perpetrators’] heads to roll but we categorically demand that every [politically] motivated crime be punished. . . . To let crime go unpunished means to approve it. Unpunished crimes then lead to the commission of other crimes. (letter of respondent 185)

If a member of StB [secret police] is tried for torturing [prisoners], the judgment is [usually] a caricature of justice. (respondent 56)

Many are disappointed that torture and killings committed during communism are not prosecuted and acknowledged with the same urgency as crimes of Nazism (respondent 39). For this, they blame the “dissidents” who opposed the regime in the 1970s and the 1980s. Dissidents acquired influential positions after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and were reluctant to prosecute crimes of communism, in which some of them may have participated during the 1950s and the 1960s.24

For some, the absence of punishment signifies the absence of any stimulus for perpetrators to realize their guilt. Without being punished, perpetrators are viewed as remorseless, perpetuating past divisions:

24. Stanislav Stransky (2000), head of the SBPV, comments on the intragroup divisions: “According to recent [official] historical records, political prisoners did not contribute to the fall of communism. The credit belongs to dissidents, those around Mr. Havel.” Interviewer: “What is the difference between the resistance and dissidents?” (A man who was present during the interview explains, “‘Resistance’ includes those who were resisting communism, working illegally, fighting with guns, distributing leaflets. But ‘dissidents’ only disagreed with the regime. They did not struggle as those of us who got twenty-five years in jail [sentence]. . . . Did communism give any dissident sentence longer than five years?”) Stransky continues: “Our opinions differed. . . . They perceived us of being too radical.” Interviewer: “In what sense radical?” “When we said that old cadres must leave ministries, they said they were experts without whom [the system] would not work.”

A number of dissidents were imprisoned, but others were persecuted by denying them access to their professions, preventing the education of their children, and so on. The major source of tension between dissidents and the resistance is perhaps that some of the former were high-profile Communist Party members in the 1950s and the 1960s, when most of the latter were incarcerated (cf. note 10).
They have not improved so far. They still hold leading positions. That’s the reason of our bad situation today. They cynically hold contempt for the suffering and killing inflicted. . . . I would ask for justice in order to make them realize their guilt. Otherwise I strongly believe in higher justice. No sin remains unpunished. Anyway, there is always the voice of one’s conscience. (letter of respondent 148)

This respondent believes that perpetrators are capable of moral development. They would eventually hear “the voice of their conscience,” and if not, their change would be brought about by punishment. A change of perpetrators’ attitudes may make forgiveness possible.

On the other hand, foregoing punishment and facing remorseless wrongdoers may still allow forgiveness to take place. Forgiveness may show a lack of respect for the agency of perpetrators (Murphy 2003). In this situation, the positive impact that punishment can have on forgiveness is limited because downgrading perpetrators is redundant:

He did not know what he was doing. I do not want to bear hatred. (respondent 137)
[They were] in fact fanatical fools. (respondent 170)
Blessed are the poor in spirit. (respondent 348)
I feel sorry for him [the wrongdoer]. (respondent 489)
The informers and prison wardens under totalitarian regimes were miserable and poor-minded people. (respondent 713)

Despite forgiveness taking place, the social construction of enemies as lesser beings with lower morality may in effect mean their dehumanization, as theorized by Murphy (2003).

APology AND FORGIVenESS

Apology was found to be the second strongest facilitator of forgiveness. Among those who forgave, the majority claimed that their forgiveness was a direct result of apologies. Even apologies from the perpetrators’ families led to forgiveness (respondents 270, 273). Some respondents were emphatic about demanding an apology as a condition for forgiveness, saying that they “forgave [only] the person who apologized” (respondent 307). Many of those who did not forgive claimed that they would have if perpetrators had apologized or shown remorse (respondents 154, 545, 561, 760). The views of the following respondents are typical:

It is impossible to forgive. I have not met any secret police members who confessed their guilt. (respondent 33)
There is no effort [on the part of perpetrators] to express themselves. (respondent 189)
They do not feel guilty. (respondent 272)

Unfortunately, the vast majority of former political prisoners encountered remorseless and arrogant perpetrators who, as one of them put it, “behaved in the same way as
during communism” (respondent 215). The lack of change of perpetrators’ attitudes makes it hard to forgive, even for devoted Christian believers. According to Antonin Huvar (1999), a former political prisoner and a Catholic priest,

It is impossible to forgive if you see how they treated [World War II hero] General Pika. They hanged him next to the rubbish. How they treated him before. If he needed to go to the toilet, he could not close the door. They were so insensitive. Somebody has to give them back their sensitivity. They were supposed to make contrition to wash this away. If there is a guilt that is not dealt with, the curse remains. The nation is cursed twice if they do not deal with those who were killed. Schools, courts, judges, even the constitutional court. We are the last ones who cry for this because the majority of us have already died.

FORGIVENESS AND CHRISTIANITY

Frequencies of church attendance, which indicate the commitment to Christian belief, are the strongest facilitator of forgiveness. When asked why they forgave, some of the victims quoted the Bible or the prayer that contains unconditional forgiveness (respondents 13 and 119). Others preferred to leave the judgment to God (respondents 26, 147, 151, 249, 712, and 791). A few viewed forgiveness philosophically as a defining moment of Christianity (respondent 56). Some, as Christians, felt obliged to forgive, as evidenced by the following quotes:

I have forgiven for my own peace in my soul—reconciliation with God. (respondent 287)
As a Christian, I forgive anyone, even those who completely ruined my old age. (respondent 456)

However, forgiveness among Christians is not necessarily unconditional:

As a Christian I have my duty to forgive in the “work prescription.” But nobody asked me for forgiveness, so I cannot mark “yes.” Yet I cannot mark “no” either because I am ready to forgive. (respondent 132)

The above respondent perceived forgiveness as a gesture conditional on the action of the perpetrator. He was the social agent who had the power and was ready to forgive when asked. The claiming of subjectivity and agency validates our arguments that forgiveness requires power, which has to be restored by eliminating inequalities between victims and perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

This article aims to determine plausible policy interventions that may promote forgiveness among victims of human rights abuses. The analyses confirm our major theoretical assumptions, according to which forgiveness requires empowering victims, downgrading perpetrators, and restoring the balance in their civic relationship. We
have found a direct effect of individual empowerment, social empowerment, political empowerment, punishment, apology, and Christianity on forgiveness. Underlying these factors is a complex web of relationships that link length of imprisonment, torture, social empowerment, individual empowerment, and forgiveness with length of imprisonment, Christianity, political empowerment, and forgiveness. This suggests the intersection of different measures of transitional justice, as well as their complementarities, in promoting forgiveness.

Victims are a heterogeneous population with diverse needs and beliefs and values. Each individual’s readiness to forgive may be triggered by a different factor. Therefore, forgiveness may be achieved through a multiplicity of means. In light of this, we suggest a distinction between four modes of forgiveness: religious, retributive, reparatory, and reconciliatory forgiveness. Religious forgiveness is unconditional. It is motivated by internal religious belief (e.g., Christianity) and does not depend on external circumstances. The other three modes of forgiveness are dependent on various conditions and interventions that help to restore equality in civic relationships, previously damaged by political crime. Retributive forgiveness is dependent on the capacity of the state to deliver justice to the victims and punishment to the perpetrators. Reparatory forgiveness is dependent on the individual, social, and political empowerment of victims. In other words, it is conditional on the capacity of the state to provide victims with reparations, the attitude of the community toward victims, and the availability of channels for victims to participate in political life of the country. Reconciliatory forgiveness is conditional on the apology of perpetrators to victims. We argue that apology may be promoted by a reconciliation commission. Since no reconciliation commission was established in the Czech Republic, we were unable to determine the role of a reconciliation commission in promoting forgiveness.

Our findings suggest that all the hypothesized interventions promote forgiveness. Therefore, the supposed major dilemma of transitional justice, which juxtaposes justice and reconciliation as two mutually exclusive ends and has repeatedly been postulated in the evolving field since the mid-1990s, may not be a dilemma at all. Policy interventions that promote justice may be able to promote reconciliation at the same time. They may not be mutually exclusive. Criminal tribunals, reconciliation commissions, and comprehensive reparation programs may all facilitate forgiveness because each of them uses a different means—punishment, apology, and empowerment—to arrive at forgiveness, and each may have meaning for a different segment of victims.

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