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Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Attributions of Blame and the Struggle over Apartheid

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In an effort to put its past firmly behind, the New South Africa created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to document human rights abuses under apartheid and to grant amnesty to those confessing their nefarious deeds. South Africa's democratic experiment depends mightily upon whether truth does in fact bring about reconciliation. Consequently, we examine whether ordinary South Africans accept the theories of blame that underlie the truth and reconciliation process. Based on a formal experiment within a representative sample of South Africans, our results confirm some conventional hypotheses (e.g., leaders are judged more responsible for their deeds than followers), repudiate others (noble motives do little to exonerate violent actions), and modify still others (actors are judged by the severity of their action's consequences, although it matters little whether "combatants" or "civilians" were the victims). We conclude that the dark legacy of the apartheid past makes the consolidation of the democratic transformation problematical.

In early 1998 South Africa began winding down an extraordinary social experiment in the promotion of national unity and the consolidation of the country's attempted democratic transition. As provided for in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the South Africans had charged the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with documenting the atrocities of the apartheid era and with granting amnesty to those who confessed their deeds. The entire process is perceived by many South African elites as the most effective way to mend the wounds of the past and as a means of moving forward into the new era of majority rule in South Africa. The first phase of the commission's work—in which applications for amnesty were heard—concluded with the highly controversial final report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998) of the TRC on October 29, 1998.

The truth and reconciliation process is based on a number of presuppositions about political psychology. Foremost and most obvious is the assumption that knowledge promotes forgiveness, that reconciliation flows from truth. If South Africans can come to understand the nature of the violence under the apartheid regime, and the reasons for those actions, then perhaps they can learn to live together, to tolerate, during the difficult transition challenges that await them.

Political psychology theories have much to say about truth and reconciliation, especially insofar as blame and responsibility are concerned. A portion of the voluminous literature on responsibility focuses on the processes by which ordinary citizens ascribe blame for political misdeeds (e.g., McGraw 1987, 1990, 1991). For instance, that research teaches us that those giving orders are typically judged to be more responsible for their actions than those executing the orders of others (e.g., Kelman and Hamilton 1989). The truth and reconciliation process in South Africa provides a felicitous opportunity to test several attribution hypotheses within the context of a real and highly meaningful political dispute.

Consequently, our purpose is to test several hypotheses drawn from blame attribution theory. The research site is South Africa, a venue not ordinarily considered in the Western-dominated literature. In particular, we focus on the ways in which several contextual aspects of the struggle over apartheid affect the blame judgments formed by ordinary South Africans. Our concern is not just with atrocities committed by the apartheid government; we consider the responsibility of the forces struggling against apartheid as well. In addition to assessing the role that contextual influences.

Some authors distinguish between blame and responsibility. For example: "Responsibility... considers several dimensions: (a) the extent to which the actor caused the effect, (b) how aware the actor was of the consequences of his/her actions, (c) the actor's intent to produce the event, (d) whether the actor was coerced, and (e) the actor's appreciation that his/her action is morally wrong. Blame is assigned when an observer refuses to accept the actor's excuses or justifications for an action that the observer has judged to have been committed intentionally" (Hallman and Wandersman 1992, 113, emphasis in original). But since responsibility has a variety of meanings (e.g., Hart 1968)—including the commonly used conceptualization as a moral evaluation of a human action, or blameworthiness (e.g., Fincham and Jaspers 1980)—generally we treat the two concepts as interchangeable.

Most, but not all, research on blame attribution has been conducted in the United States or other relatively well-developed countries. For exceptions, see Crittenden and Bae 1994 (Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines); Hamilton and Hagware 1992 (United States and Japan); Hamilton and Sanders 1992, 1995 (United States, Russia, and Japan); and Sanders and Hamilton 1992, 1996 (United States, Russia, and Japan). Very little work has been conducted in Africa.

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ences play in the formation of these blame attributions, we consider how these judgments are related to individual forgiveness and support for granting amnesty to the perpetrators. Our method is experimental, based on a hypothetical (but realistic) vignette administered during face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of South Africans at the close of 1997.

Through analysis of the data, we demonstrate that some of the assumptions commonly made about the origins of blame attributions are not supported empirically (e.g., the seriousness of the consequences of the act), even if several of the conventional hypotheses concerning attributions are confirmed (e.g., obedience to authority). Perhaps our most important finding is that many of the presuppositions underlying the truth and reconciliation process are incompatible with the ways ordinary South Africans attribute blame, as well as the ways in which their blame judgments affect their views toward amnesty. We conclude by speculating about the implications of our findings for the difficult process of democratic consolidation that awaits South Africa.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ending apartheid in South Africa came at a considerable cost to those who had long struggled against the oppressive system. A central issue in the talks over the transformation of the apartheid state was amnesty. In South Africa, in contrast to other states emerging from a tyrannical past (e.g., Argentina and Uganda), the ancien régime was not defeated. The transition therefore had to be brokered. The National Party and the leaders of other powerful white-dominated institutions (such as the security forces and the police) made amnesty a nonnegotiable centerpiece of their demands (see Omar 1996). The creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the power to grant amnesty, was the price the liberation forces had to pay in order to secure a peaceful transition to majority rule (Rwelamira 1996).

The TRC was provided for by the Postamble/Endnote to the Interim Constitution of 1993 and was enacted by the new parliament in 1995 as the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (No. 34, 1995). The creation of the TRC was certainly controversial. Many argued that international law and convention forbade granting amnesty for crimes against humanity as well as torture and similar offenses (their slogan was: "No amnesty, no amnesia, just justice," quoted in Verwoerd 1997). Nonetheless, the South African Constitutional Court passed on the constitutionality of the act, and the TRC began functioning in 1995.

Parliament granted the TRC the authority to give amnesty to acts "associated with political objectives." Those whose acts were committed "for personal gain, out of malice, ill will or spite, or in furtherance of acts where, objectively seen, no reasonable relationship exists between the act committed and the objective pursued" were not eligible for amnesty (Rwelamira 1996, 16). Those seeking amnesty were to be judged by the "motive of the perpetrator, whether the act was committed in the cause of or as part of a political uprising, the gravity of the offence, whether it was primarily directed at a political opponent or objective and whether such an act was committed in the execution of an order given by [an] organization, body or institution of which he is a member or a supporter" (Rwelamira 1996, 16). Thus, the law recognizes several factors that mitigate responsibility and open the door to amnesty, including the motives of the act, the degree of choice available to the actor, and the degree to which the action was clearly focused on and limited to the actor's enemies.

Through the end of 1998, the TRC received roughly 15,000 statements from victims and approximately 7,000 applications for amnesty. As of December 9, 1998, the TRC had granted 216 amnesties; it had rejected 160 applicants because they denied their guilt, 3,031 because their acts were committed for personal gain or because no political motive was attached to the action, and 864 because their acts were committed after the cut-off date or outside the TRC's jurisdiction.

The TRC is certainly important for the future of South African politics, but this article is not, strictly speaking, a study of that institution. Instead, the truth and reconciliation process raises a host of interesting questions about how people formulate blame and how these judgments affect their political stances. For instance, the TRC posits that political motives ameliorate responsibility for violent actions, whereas nonpolitical motives do not. Do ordinary South Africans accept this premise; do they in fact base their blame attributions on the motives of the perpetrator? In short, are the assumptions made by the truth and reconciliation process compatible with the way ordinary South Africans parcel out blame for violence in the struggle over apartheid? Some important and useful theories of blame attribution are directly relevant to this research problem.

THEORIES OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

A vast body of research in political psychology considers the problem of how individuals attribute responsi-

5 These statistics are taken from the TRC’s web site http://www.truth.org.za (accessed March 8, 1999), an extremely useful source of information about the proceedings of the commission.

6 Osiel (1995) argues that the effectiveness of truth commissions in fulfilling their various functions is contingent on assumptions about how citizens attribute responsibility for the crimes of the old regime. The dilemma is that "people differ radically on their judgments of recent history (that is, on what went wrong and who is responsible), and yet share the view that some resolution of this interpretive disagreement must be reached among themselves for the country to set itself back on track" (Osiel 1995, 493). See also Kaye 1997.


9 Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) and others v. President of the Republic of South Africa and others CCT 117/96 (July 25, 1996).
ability for behaviors and events. Much of this literature analyzes citizens’ attributions of responsibility for macropolitical outcomes, especially economic conditions (e.g., Feldman 1985; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Pfeffley 1985; Przeworski et al. 1996; Weaver 1986). In addition, a solid body of literature on candidate evaluations has emerged that relies as well on understandings of attributional processes (e.g., Iyengar 1991). These are not the sorts of judgments on which we focus. Instead, following McGraw (1990, 1991) and especially sociological scholars such as Hamilton and Sanders (e.g., 1992), our concern is with judgments of the discrete and contextualized actions of individual political actors. Specifically, we investigate the willingness of ordinary citizens to lay blame on a specific individual for violent actions during the period of struggle over apartheid in South Africa.

Few have thought more about the origins of blame attributions than McGraw. Capitalizing on the myriad scandals that have characterized American politics in the late twentieth century, she points to two major types of ways politicians use to avoid responsibility—excuses and justifications. These she further dimensionalizes as follows (McGraw 1991, 1136):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excuses</th>
<th>Justifications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. past mitigating circumstances</td>
<td>1. present benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. present mitigating circumstances</td>
<td>2. future benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. horizontal diffusion of responsibility</td>
<td>3. comparison to the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. vertical diffusion of responsibility</td>
<td>4. comparison to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. plea of ignorance</td>
<td>5. comparison to hypothetical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. fairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. conscience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In her research McGraw (1991, 1142) discovered that excuses “claiming mitigating circumstances and justifications appealing to normative principles or focusing on present or future benefits were more satisfactory than excuses that attempted to diffuse responsibility or plead ignorance and justifications involving comparisons with abstract standards.” Generally, however, justifications were more effective at reducing blame than excuses (p. 1148).

Excuses and justifications are important for blame attributions, but these judgments are also highly contextual. The role of the actor—whether s/he is a leader or a follower—influences blame (see Hamilton and Hagiwara 1992), as do a variety of characteristics associated with individual behaviors (e.g., causality, foreseeability, and intentionality). For instance, Hamilton and Sanders (1992) investigated responsibility judgments in Japan and the United States, focusing on the importance of context and roles in blame attributions, and especially on the actor’s mental state and the act’s consequences. They concluded: “Responsibility is contingent upon at least two factors: what the person did, and what the person was obliged to do” (Hamilton and Sanders 1992, 18). Blame attributions, it seems, are highly dependent upon the circumstances of the behavior.

Within this general theoretical framework, we focus on four contextual attributes of the South African experiment. These variables are drawn from the TRC legislation (see above) and are well grounded in the attribution literature. Our research relies upon an experimental vignette included within a survey of the South African mass public. This portion of the interview began with a short story about “Phillip” and his activities during the era of apartheid. In the stories, four (dichotomous) characteristics were manipulated, resulting in sixteen versions of the vignette (i.e., this was a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ fully crossed design). Each respondent, of course, heard only a single story, and respondents were randomly assigned to vignette versions. The manipulations were orthogonal to one another, and the four dummy variables representing the manipulations are therefore uncorrelated. Table 1 reports the attributes we varied in the stories.

The most culpable version of the vignettes read:

Phillip was a member of the Security Branch of the South African police. He was a senior official in the organisation, he gave orders that others had to follow. As a result of his actions, people who were not directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by hatred towards those he killed.

The least blameworthy version read:

Phillip was a member of MK, the ANC’s military wing. He was not a senior official in the organisation and therefore had to take orders from others higher up in the organisation. As a result of his actions, people who were directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by hatred towards those he killed.

As expected, the respondents found the most blame in the first version (mean = .77) and the least blame in the second (mean = .40).
TABLE 1. The Structure of the Vignette’s Experimental Manipulations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mani~ulation</th>
<th>Versions</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor goals and</td>
<td>A. Phillip was a member of the Security Branch of the South African Police.</td>
<td>South African Police → Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roles</td>
<td>B. Phillip was a member of MK, the ANC’s military wing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>A. He was a senior official in the organization; he gave orders that others had to follow.</td>
<td>Leader → Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(leadership)</td>
<td>B. He was not a senior official in the organization and therefore had to take orders from others higher up in the organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionality and</td>
<td>A. As a result of his actions, people who were not directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed.</td>
<td>Injured Innocents → Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consequences</td>
<td>B. As a result of his actions, people who were directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motives</td>
<td>A. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by hatred toward those he killed.</td>
<td>Motivated by Hatred → Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by the belief that what he was doing was necessary and justified by the struggle.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Within the context of the period during which the fieldwork was conducted, we are certain that virtually no respondents doubted whether Phillip actually engaged in the behavior. Not only were South African media constantly reporting on those coming before the TRC, but also the vignette itself implies that Phillip admitted his actions when, in the last sentence, he offers a justification for his behavior. Furthermore, amnesty applicants were legally required to acknowledge their guilt. Thus, issues of questionable causality for the action, which frequently concern attribution researchers, are essentially held constant in this analysis.12

The four experimental manipulations encapsulate the different hypotheses under consideration.

**Actor Goals and Roles**

The defining element of South African politics is, of course, apartheid. Many who struggled against the apartheid regime believed they were engaging in a just war against the ultimate evil.13 Conversely, some maintain that those battling apartheid often violated human rights and committed other unacceptable atrocities.14

Consequently, we told half the respondents that Phillip was an agent of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC,15 and the other half that he was an agent of the South African security forces. We have no doubt that whether the actor is said to be fighting for or against apartheid has a great deal to do with responsibility and blame judgments. Indeed, the goals of the actor most likely shape virtually all reactions to Phillip’s behaviors.16 Thus:

**HYPOTHESIS 1.** Those sympathizing with the goals of the actor are less likely to attribute blame for his actions.

**Obedience**

A very common way of excusing one’s behavior is to claim that one was only following orders (for the classic experiments on obedience, see Milgram 1974). Researchers frequently find that obedient actors are held less responsible for their actions, whereas autonomous actors are held more responsible (e.g., Hamilton 1986; Hamilton and Sanders 1992, 1995; Kelman and Hamilton 1989; Sanders and Hamilton 1996). Obedient actors presumably have less choice and hence less

12 Fincham and Roberts (1985) report that perceptions of causation are a strong determinant of blame. See also Sanders and Hamilton 1996.
13 For instance, the current Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, argues that there is no moral equivalence between the fight to preserve white Afrikaner minority domination and the struggle to free all South Africans, since apartheid was declared a crime against humanity (“Truth Commission . . .” 1996).
14 It should be noted that at least two “truth commissions” in South Africa predated the TRC. These bodies were established to investigate brutality in the ANC’s detention camps located throughout southern Africa during the struggle against apartheid. For an account of these commissions see Hayner 1994. See also the final report of the TRC, which was quite critical of the ANC.
16 Hamilton (1986) alerts us to the importance of the actor’s role in structuring responsibility judgments, and that is essentially what we have modeled with this manipulation. We refer to this variable, however, as the actor’s goals, since we believe that the respondents were reacting mainly on the basis of whether they sympathized with the struggle against apartheid or opposed it. We adduce empirical evidence on this score below. Note as well that this manipulation is very similar to what Gonzales et al. (1995, 137) term “social distance,” a crucial element of their “sociolinguistic perspective” on accountability. Although we use different terms, our findings are quite comparable to theirs.
control over their own actions, so they are not held to the same standards as those who order others or who commit actions autonomously (see Shaver 1985; Weiner 1995). Cultural norms of collectivism (in contrast to individualism) obviate some of this responsibility but not all (e.g., Hamilton and Sanders 1995). Consequently:

**HYPOTHESIS 2. Assessments of blame for violent actions during the struggle over apartheid are related to the leadership role of the individual who engages in the actions. Leaders will be judged more responsible than followers.**

**Intentionality and the Severity of the Consequences**

One of the most well-established findings from the psychological literature on responsibility attribution is that actions with more serious consequences are subject to stronger responsibility claims than actions with minor consequences (e.g., Burger 1981; Fin cham and Jaspers 1980). In the South African context, actions that injure “noncombatants” are assumed to be more consequential than those injuring people directly involved in the struggle over apartheid, as acknowledged in the TRC legislation. Therefore:

**HYPOTHESIS 3. Greater blame will be assessed against actions resulting in the death of people not involved in the struggle, whereas lesser blame will be assessed when “combatants” are killed by the actor.**

**Motives**

McGraw (1990, 128) claims that “justifications appealing to normative principles—ethical standards like fairness and conscience ... —are consistently among the most effective” ways to diffuse responsibility for untoward behaviors. Motives are highly salient in the South African case, since some actions were clearly taken out of hatred (mainly racial) rather than ideology, and because the 1995 legislation specifically refers to the motives and perspectives of the individual in committing the act (applicants for amnesty are required to have acted with a political motive). In accord with the legislation:

**HYPOTHESIS 4. Actions attributable to principled motives will ameliorate blame attributions, whereas actions attributable to less principled motives (such as hatred) will heighten blame attributions.**

**Summary**

These four contextual factors are important from the perspectives of both theory and hypothesis testing and the practical politics of South African democratization. To the extent that South Africans form their blame judgments according to the factors identified in the legislation, truth may indeed lead to reconciliation. Otherwise, the legitimacy of the entire truth and reconciliation process may be undermined.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Our analysis is based on a panel survey of South Africans in 1996 and 1997. The first wave was conducted in fall (April through June) 1996. Interviews were completed with approximately 94% of the 3,258 respondents in the sample, that is, 3,031 respondents, 53% of whom are female. The respondents were interviewed in their language of choice. Versions of the instrument were prepared and validated (i.e., translated, back-translated, and reconciled) in Zulu, Xhosa, Ts wana, North Sotho, South Sotho, and Afrikaans (in addition, of course, to English). The sample is representative of all major ethnic/racial/linguistic groups in South Africa (i.e., via oversampling).

The reinterview—in which the blame attribution vignette was asked—was conducted in late 1997. The response rate was 53%, which is certainly lower than the first-wave response rate but nonetheless compares favorably with panels conducted in other parts of the world. For analytical purposes, the major issue is whether there are systematic biases in those who could not be found to be reinterviewed and those who

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19 The law reserves amnesty for actions “primarily directed at a political opponent or State property or personnel or against private property or individuals” (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, paragraph (d), subsection (3), section 20). Furthermore, actions are to be judged as well by their gravity (paragraph (c)).

18 The enabling TRC legislation is fairly specific about the actions eligible for amnesty. One criterion is “(e) whether the act, omission or offence was committed in the execution of an order of, or on behalf of, or with the approval of, the organisation, institution, liberation movement or body of which the person who committed the act was a member, an agent or a supporter” (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, sub-section (3), section 20). This implies that those executing orders are less culpable than those giving orders.

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20 This is “Response Rate #2,” calculated as suggested by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. This method treats “break-offs” or partial interviews as completed and is simply the number of complete and partial interviews divided by the number of interviews attempted. Different agencies calculate response rates differently. For instance, the U.S. General Social Survey counts a case as completed when more than half the demographic items and more than half the entire content are answered (personal communication, Tom Smith, March 9, 1999). We were able to achieve this response rate largely through repeated call-backs. Refusal to be interviewed was the overwhelming cause of nonresponse. Among African respondents, 3% refused our invitation to express their views, while the rate among the respondents of Asian origin was less than 1%. Among white and Coloured respondents, refusal rates were higher (14% and 13%, respectively). We experienced significant break-offs among about 2% of the attempted interviews. If the break-off occurred early in the interview, we simply discarded the respondent from the analysis.

21 For instance, the highly influential Political Action Panel reported response rates ranging from 65% in the Netherlands to 40% in West Germany (Jennings, van Deth, et al. 1989, Table A.1, 376). Gibson (1996a, 1996b) reports analysis of Russian and Ukrainian panel data based on a response rate of 52%, and Gibson and Caldeira (1996, 1998) analyze panel data with a rate of between 30% and 76% across the countries of the European Union.
refused to be reinterviewed. We tested for differences in attitudes toward the TRC among those who responded in 1997 and those who did not, using two items from the 1996 survey. In both instances, the differences in mean responses are statistically insignificant and entirely trivial.22 Thus, on the issues addressed here, it is highly unlikely that systematic bias undermines the representativeness of the second-wave sample.

In the analysis that follows, we distinguish among the various subcultures in South Africa, adopting the traditional racial categories used by survey researchers.23 When we report figures for the entire South African population, we weight the data so as to make the number of respondents in each group proportionate to the size of the group in the population. Although 1,518 interviews were completed, the weighted N is 1,285 (since many minority groups, such as whites, were oversampled).

In experimental research designs, it is necessary to determine whether the manipulations were successful at generating different perceptions among respondents who heard alternative versions of the vignette.24 We assume that the respondents correctly understood the side of the struggle for which Phillip took his actions (and this assumption is confirmed via empirical analysis reported below). It is necessary to check the other elements of the vignette, however, to determine whether in fact the respondents differed systematically in their perceptions of the story.

Obedience

All respondents were asked to judge whether Phillip was or was not in control of his own actions, using a ten-point scale (for question wording, see Appendix A).25 They were also asked whether Phillip was acting on his own initiative or was following orders. The perceptions of these two attributes are reported in Table B-1A (Appendix B) according to the type of story the respondent heard.

The data reveal strong differences between those who were told that Phillip was a leader and those who were told he was a follower. Those who heard that Phillip was a subordinate were much less likely to assert that he was in control of his own actions and much more likely to believe that he was following orders. Clearly, we were successful at inducing the respondents to believe that Phillip was either a leader or a follower, depending upon the version of the vignette the respondent heard.

Intentionality and Consequences

Some respondents were told that as a result of Phillip's actions, "people who were not directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed," while others were told that Phillip's actions led to "people who were directly involved in the struggle over apartheid" being killed. Did they perceive a difference in whether Phillip did or did not harm innocent people? The results are reported in Table B-1B.

This is certainly a trickier manipulation to assess, since respondents might easily believe that Phillip harmed innocent people even when he killed "combatants." Indeed, most respondents believed that innocent people were harmed; the median on the ten-point (0–1) scale is .2, with 41% of the respondents choosing the most extreme response, namely, that innocent people were harmed. Consequently, it is not surprising that the differences on this perception are not great between those told different stories about who Phillip harmed.26 Although statistically significant at .05, the means do not differ greatly. This finding must be borne in mind when assessing the influence of this manipulation on responsibility attributions.

Motives

Phillip was said to be motivated either by the belief that what he was doing was necessary and justified by the struggle or by hatred toward those he killed. To verify that this manipulation had an effect on the respondents, we asked them to judge whether Phillip was motivated by hatred or the belief he was right. Table B-1C reports the results.

Very significant differences emerged depending upon which version of the vignette the respondent heard. When Phillip was said to be motivated by hatred, he was generally perceived to hold that motive. Those who were told that he was motivated by ideology tended to accept that characterization. Thus, this experimental manipulation was quite successful.

Goals and Roles

We noted above that there was no manipulation check for the group on whose behalf Phillip was acting.

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22 The items are (1) the Truth Commission will only end badly—therefore South Africans should look to the future and forget the past, and (2) there can be no reconciliation in South Africa unless people—both black and white—have confessed to their apartheid crimes. The responses were collected on a five-point Likert response set (with high scores indicating support for the truth and reconciliation process). On the first item, the mean responses for completed and not completed second-wave interviews are 2.9 and 2.8, respectively. On the second item the means are 3.8 and 3.7, respectively.

23 These categories are derived from the insidious system used by the South African government under apartheid to classify people by race. Our use of the same or similar categories does not imply approval of anything about apartheid. Irrespective of the merits or demerits of such categories, as an empirical matter, South Africans of every race continue to use similar categories in daily life (e.g., distinguishing between black and Coloured people; see Gibson 1998). Note as well that generally we follow the South African convention of referring to black South Africans as "Africans." Coloured people are those with a mixed racial identity, mainly through intermarriage of persons of white, black African, Malay, Indian, or Xhosa descent.

24 For a useful overview of experimentation, see McGraw 1996.

25 For ease of interpretation, all variables in this analysis have been scored on a 0–1 scale.

26 As Justice Mahomed noted in the Constitutional Court decision rejecting the argument that the TRC is unconstitutional: Under apartheid, both the "wicked and the innocent have often been victims" Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) and others v. President of the Republic of South Africa and others, CCT 11796 (July 25, 1996).
 Nonetheless, there were substantial differences on many perceived personal characteristics associated with whether Phillip was said to be working for the police or the MK. Table B-1D reports these differences. Across all respondents (who, of course, are overwhelmingly Africans), Phillip was seen in a more favorable light when he was described as acting on behalf of the MK. Those who heard this version of the vignette judged Phillip to be braver, more believable, more likely to have been engaged in political action, more likely to be motivated by ideology, and less likely to have harmed innocent people. Many of these relationships are quite substantial. We will control for sympathy for the group in the analysis below, but it is important to note that many substantial perceptual differences are associated with whether Phillip was said to be acting for or against the apartheid state.

### TABLE 2. Blame Attributions by Actor by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely Blameless</th>
<th>Blameless (.1–.5)</th>
<th>Blameworthy (.51–.99)</th>
<th>Completely Blameworthy (1)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Eta-value</th>
<th>Difference of Means Tests Eta/p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Vignettes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All South Africans</td>
<td>15 28 27 29</td>
<td>.58 .38 1.237</td>
<td>.04/NS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: MK (ANC)</td>
<td>26 36 18 20</td>
<td>.48 .38 636</td>
<td>.27/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: Security Forces</td>
<td>8 17 31 44</td>
<td>.68 .35 601</td>
<td>.37/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: MK (ANC)</td>
<td>14 29 24 32</td>
<td>.55 .39 62</td>
<td>.04/NS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: Security Forces</td>
<td>20 26 34 20</td>
<td>.52 .37 55</td>
<td>.06/NS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: MK (ANC)</td>
<td>7 33 32 27</td>
<td>.62 .34 84</td>
<td>.31/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: Security Forces</td>
<td>6 41 36 17</td>
<td>.58 .31 70</td>
<td>.24/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: MK (ANC)</td>
<td>1 27 53 18</td>
<td>.68 .26 88</td>
<td>.27/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor: Security Forces</td>
<td>10 47 35 8</td>
<td>.50 .30 100</td>
<td>.24/&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rows by race total to 100%, except for rounding errors. Note that these percentages are derived from a categorical variable created from the continuous blame judgments. Blame judgments were originally assessed on a scale of 1–10 and were then converted to a 0–1 scale for analysis purposes. Original and conversion (in parentheses) values are: “completely blameless,” 1 (0); “blameless,” 2–6 (.1–.5); “blameworthy,” 6–9 (.51–.99); and “completely blameworthy,” 10 (1). The converted values are shown at the top of the columns and are used for calculation of the means and standard deviations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Should be forgiven</th>
<th>Should be punished</th>
<th>Granted amnesty</th>
<th>Allowed to sue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Blameless</td>
<td>93 (190)</td>
<td>9 (190)</td>
<td>93 (190)</td>
<td>44 (190)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blameless (.1–.5)</td>
<td>80 (352)</td>
<td>33 (352)</td>
<td>84 (352)</td>
<td>51 (352)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blameworthy (.51–.99)</td>
<td>42 (337)</td>
<td>78 (337)</td>
<td>51 (337)</td>
<td>79 (337)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Blameworthy (1)</td>
<td>15 (358)</td>
<td>94 (358)</td>
<td>18 (358)</td>
<td>90 (358)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                | Should be forgiven | Should be punished | Granted amnesty | Allowed to sue | Categorical blame judgments, recoded as indicated in Table 2, footnote a. Percentages of the N in each cell. The first entry in the table means that 93% of the 190 South Africans who hold Phillip completely blameless believe he should be forgiven. | Percentage who "might," "probably," or "definitely" would forgive Phillip. | Percentage who would punish Phillip "very lightly," "punish but not very severely," or "punish very severely." | Percentage asserting that amnesty should "probably" or "definitely" be granted. | Percentage asserting that victims should "probably" or "definitely" be allowed to sue Phillip. |
BLAME ATTRIBUTIONS

The basic dependent variable for this analysis is derived from the response to the following item, asked immediately after the respondent had heard the vignette:

First, think about whether or not you blame Phillip personally for what happened in this story. If 10 means that you completely blame Phillip for what happened and 1 means you don’t blame him at all, which number from 10 to 1 best describes how you feel? For example, you might answer with a 4 if you think Phillip should be blamed only somewhat, or a 7 if you think he should be blamed, but not very much.

The responses to this question are reported in the top portion of Table 2 (responses have been recoded to a scale from 0 to 1).

South Africans are deeply divided about whether Phillip ought to be blamed for his actions. Consider, first, the categorical version of the blame variable. Among all South Africans, 15% claim that Phillip is completely blameless for his actions, while 29% believe him to be completely blameworthy. The average response is toward the "blameworthy" end of the scale, but fully 44% of the South Africans ascribe relatively little or no blame to Phillip, even though he is said to have killed people.

Table 2 also reports the differences across the various racial/ethnic groups in their judgments of blame. Considering all vignettes together, racial differences in blame attributions initially appear to be inconsequential (but see below). South Africans of Asian origin and whites are slightly but insignificantly more likely than Africans to attribute blame, and Coloured South Africans score even lower on the blame measure, but generally race is a poor predictor of attitudes. The variance within racial groups is far more substantial than the variance across groups (as reflected in the insignificant eta statistic).

As expected, a strong interaction emerges between race and the actor manipulation. The lower portion of Table 2 reports the relationship between the actor’s position and attributions of responsibility within the four major racial/ethnic groups. For Africans and whites, there is a strong connection between the actor’s position and attributions of blame; for Coloured people and South Africans of Asian origin, no such relationship exists.27 Blacks are much more likely to attribute blame to Phillip when he is said to be an agent of the MK than when he is portrayed as an agent of the MK. For instance, 20% of the African respondents attribute total blame to Phillip the MK agent, while 44% attribute complete blame to Phillip the Security Branch representative. It is noteworthy that Africans are not entirely forgiving of the MK (38% ascribe at least some blame), but similar actions undertaken to defend the apartheid state are judged more harshly than actions in opposition to the status quo ante.

Whites are another matter—they are more likely to attribute blame to the MK Phillip than to the Security Branch Phillip: 18% completely blame the former, and only 8% completely blame the latter. The relationship between blame and actor position is nearly as strong among Africans, although in the opposite direction. Most whites do not hold the Security Branch blameless (43% ascribe at least some blame), but they, like the Africans, seem to apply a double standard in judging the apartheid state and its opponents.

Although the number of respondents is relatively small, both Coloured and Asian respondents judge the MK and the Security Branch similarly (see the eta coefficients). A majority of these respondents attribute at least some blame to the MK and to the Security Branch.

Note as well that there are substantial differences among the racial/ethnic groups even when presented with the same actor. When Phillip is said to be an agent of the MK, whites are much more likely to attribute blame than any other group (mean = .68), and Africans are much less likely (mean = .44). Conversely, when Phillip is represented as an agent of the Security Branch, Africans are most likely to assign blame (mean = .73), and white (mean = .50) and Coloured people (mean = .52) are least likely. The largest differences here are between Africans and other South Africans. Race/ethnicity is thus a significant predictor of blame attributions through its interaction with this experimental variable.28

We also asked the respondents several other questions about what should be done to Phillip, including whether he should be punished, forgiven, and granted amnesty, and whether Phillip’s victims should be allowed to sue him in court (an important issue in the South African context). The answers to these questions are reported in Table 3 (see Appendix A for the exact wording).

There is a great deal of consistency across the responses to these various questions.29 Those who blame Phillip for his actions are likely to want to punish him, to deny him amnesty, and so on. Many of these relationships are very strong. For instance, the proportion of respondents who would punish Phillip ranges from 8% to 94% across the categories of blame attribution; the proportion who would forgive him ranges from 93% to 15%.

We will use the blame attributions as the dependent variable for the remainder of the hypothesis testing. The validity of this measure is attested by the relationships in Table 3. Moreover, this is the sort of variable most commonly used in attribution research. In the conclusions, we return to the more practical questions of forgiveness and amnesty, but blameworthiness is our main variable of interest for the hypothesis testing.

Note that since the manipulations are orthogonal to one another, bivariate and multivariate analysis produces the same result, and therefore it is not necessary to control for the other experimental factors when considering this relationship.

27 Modeling this interaction in OLS strongly supports this conclusion. The position of the actor accounts for 7% of the variance in blame judgments, the three dummy variables representing the respondent’s race/ethnicity account directly for no explained variance, but the interaction terms between race and actor position explain an additional 5% of the variance.

28 Indeed, when these items are factor analyzed, a single dominant factor emerges.
### TABLE 4. Blame Attributions by Experimental and Perceptual Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Treatment</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor role: MK (ANC) v. Security Branch</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience: Follower v. Leader</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences: Civilians v. Combatants</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive: Ideology v. Hatred</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was following orders</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not harm innocent people</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by belief in rightness</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of estimate</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.09***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Beta is the standardized regression coefficient; r is the bivariate correlation coefficient; s.e. is the standard error of the unstandardized regression coefficient. ***$p < .001$. Minimum pairwise N = 1,233.

### Analysis: Modeling Blame Attributions

The first step in our analysis involves assessing the degree to which the experimental manipulations account for variation in the attributions of blame. Model I in Table 4 reports the results of regressing blame attributions on the experimental treatment variables.

Two of the experimental manipulations have highly significant direct effects on blame judgments, and two do not. The strongest influence is from the role of the actor. When Phillip is said to be a member of the South African Security Branch, the respondents are far more likely to attribute blame for his actions than when Phillip is described as a member of the ANC’s MK. We observed a similar but weaker direct effect from the obedience manipulation: Leaders are apparently held more responsible for their actions than followers, although, perhaps surprisingly, not greatly so. The type of people injured by Phillip’s actions has no effect on responsibility judgments, which is consistent with the finding that few respondents believe it legitimate to kill even those directly involved in the struggle over apartheid. Finally, the motivation of the actor similarly has no influence, with ideological motivations clearly not excusing the actor from responsibility.

Both the significant and insignificant findings from the experimental manipulation are substantively important. Clearly, most South Africans are willing to attribute greater blame to those fighting to maintain apartheid than to those fighting against apartheid, ceteris paribus. The issue is not who got injured in the struggle, and it is not even the specific motives of the individual actor. Although willing to attribute less blame to subordinates, most South Africans are overwhelmingly influenced by which side Phillip was fighting for, a distinction which is not, of course, an element of the TRC legislation.

Given the strong influence of the actor’s position on judgments of blame, we hypothesized an interactive relationship with the other variables. Interestingly, no such effect emerges.30 The influences of the obedience, consequences, and motive experimental treatments are virtually identical for those told a story about an agent of the MK and those told about an agent of the Security Branch. For instance, MK leaders are judged to be more blameworthy than followers, just as are police leaders.

The simple equation with the four experimental variables predicting blame attributions does a credible job of explaining the variance in the dependent variable. Were the manipulations perfectly perceived (or had we designed them to be stronger), the coefficients would be much larger, of course. In order to assess the full effects of both the experimental and perceptual variables on blame judgments, we added the three perceptual variables to the equation reported in Table 4. This additional analysis greatly elucidates the basis of blame attributions.

Model II in Table 4 explains nearly half the variance.

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30 We analyzed a fully saturated model (i.e., including all possible interactions among the experimental manipulations) and found no interactive effects whatsoever. The linear model accounts for 8.51% of the variance in blame attributions; adding the ten interaction terms results in an $R^2$ of only .0898. None of the tests of the increments in explained variance for the two-way, three-way, or four-way interactions is statistically significant (even at the .05 level). The regressions confirm the conclusion that all effects of the experimental manipulations are linear in nature.
TABLE 5. Blame Attributions by Experimental and Perceptual Variables, Controlling for Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Asian Origin</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Coloured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b  s.e. Beta</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>b  s.e. Beta</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Treatment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor role: MK (ANC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Security Branch</td>
<td>-.05 .05 -.07</td>
<td>-.06 -.09 -.04 -.16**</td>
<td>-.31 .12 .02 .16***</td>
<td>.37 -.03 -.06 -.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience: Follower v. Leader</td>
<td>.01 .05 .01</td>
<td>.09 .02 .04 .04</td>
<td>.14 .03 .02 .04</td>
<td>.11 .00 .07 .00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences: Civilians v. Combatants</td>
<td>-.08 .05 -.13</td>
<td>-.08 -.05 -.04 -.09</td>
<td>-.13 .01 .02 .02</td>
<td>-.00 -.05 -.06 -.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive: Ideology v. Hatred</td>
<td>.01 .05 .02</td>
<td>.14 .01 .04 .01</td>
<td>.10 -.03 -.02 -.03</td>
<td>.01 .01 .07 .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was following orders</td>
<td>-.28 .08 -.27***</td>
<td>-.35 -.27 -.06 -.31***</td>
<td>-.46 -.27 .03 -.27***</td>
<td>-.50 -.09 -.09 .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not harm</td>
<td>-.31 .10 -.23**</td>
<td>-.32 -.29 -.08 -.25***</td>
<td>-.43 -.47 .03 -.40***</td>
<td>-.60 -.41 -.10 -.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was motivated by belief in rightness</td>
<td>-.22 .08 -.23**</td>
<td>-.35 -.11 -.06 -.14</td>
<td>-.39 -.18 -.02 -.19***</td>
<td>-.47 -.17 .09 -.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.97 .08</td>
<td>.93 .06</td>
<td>.87 .03</td>
<td>.83 .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error estimate</td>
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<td>.24</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>154 187</td>
<td>1,002 116</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Beta is the standardized regression coefficient; r is the bivariate correlation coefficient; s.e. is the standard error of the unstandardized regression coefficient. **p < .01; ***p < .001.

in blame attributions. Blaming Phillip is most likely when he is perceived to have injured innocent people, thought to be a leader rather than a subordinate, and is seen as motivated by hatred. Each of these effects is fairly strong statistically. Even within this powerful equation, there is an independent effect of the actor's group, although it is comparatively modest. As in the simple model, there is no interactive effect between the actor's position and either the experimental or perceptual variables.

It is perhaps not surprising that harm and blame are so strongly associated. After all, perceptions of harm are natural immediate antecedents to blame. What is more surprising, however, is that perceptions of the harm done are not strongly determined by whether Phillip is said to have injured people involved in the struggle or people who were not involved (see Table B-1B). Harm perceptions seem to originate in other perceptions and psychological characteristics of the respondents, more than from the experimental manipulations.

Adding the perceptual variables to the model greatly reduces the effect of the experimental treatment variables (as it should). For instance, the effect of the obedience manipulation is reduced from statistical and substantive significance to unimportance in Model II. Being told that Phillip was a leader matters for blame attributions, but its effect is filtered through perceptions.

Since the analysis above indicates that different racial/ethnic groups attribute blame somewhat differently, we have estimated blame equations for each racial/ethnic group. The results are shown in Table 5. Note that the number of non-African respondents is relatively small, with the consequence that the standard errors of these coefficients are relatively large.

First, observe that the equation does a much better job of predicting the blame assessments of Africans than it does for the other three groups. This may indicate more coherent and crystallized views among blacks, perhaps reflecting the greater salience of truth and reconciliation issues to them.

Second, some of the coefficients do indeed differ across the four groups. For Coloured and South Africans of Asian origin, the actor's role makes no difference for blame judgments; for Africans and whites, blame indeed depends upon whether Phillip was said to be a representative of the Security Branch or the MK. Moreover, the signs of the coefficients are opposite: Africans ascribe greater blame to the governmental actor; whites blame the MK actor more. This finding comports with the analysis reported above.
Yet, most coefficients differ little across the four groups. For instance, all South Africans are influenced by the perceived harm done by the actor, even if Africans and Coloured people are especially influenced by this factor. All except Coloured South Africans blame the actor less when he was said to be following orders. Although the results do not uniformly achieve statistical significance (given the small numbers of respondents), all South Africans adjust their blame attributions according to their perceptions of the purity of the actor’s motivations. Thus, although some important differences flow from whether the actor was fighting for or against the apartheid state, generally South Africans of every color tend to attribute blame in fairly similar ways.

Since the role of the actor has a direct effect among Africans and whites, it is possible that the causes of blame attributions are a function of the actor’s identity, that is, that there may be an interactive effect between the actor and the three perceptual variables. In fact, no such relationship exists (data not shown). The influence of the perceptual variables on blame judgments is not dependent upon the status of the actor. Thus, not only does race make little difference for the process of attributing blame, but also the actor’s role makes little difference.

Perhaps the most important finding here is that the connection between the perceptions and blame assessment do not vary much by race/ethnicity and do not vary by the role of the actor. This implies that the process of assigning blame—the information on which people rely in making blame judgments—differs little across the various racial/ethnic groups, even if the level of blame does differ by group. When South Africans of any race perceive harm, for instance, attributions of blame follow. This is a significant finding.

But do South Africans of different races vary in how they arrive at their assessments of harm, motives, and leadership? Table 6 reports the results of regressing the three perceptual variables on the actor role manipulation, three race dummy variables, and the interactions of actor and race. The excluded group in this analysis is Africans, so each significance test indicates the differences between the given coefficient and the coefficient for Africans.

Note first that race does indeed make a difference in these perceptions. The effects are most pronounced on perceptions of whether Phillip harmed innocent people. White South Africans are much less likely to believe that Phillip harmed innocents, especially when he is said to be a member of the security forces (see the interactive effect). Coloured people and South Africans of Asian origin differ slightly and inconsistently from Africans. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the perceptions of Phillip’s motives. The perception that Phillip was following orders is much less racially charged. In general, as with many of the findings reported here, the great divide is between black and white South Africans.

Racial differences in blame attribution are complex, but a simplified view of the process is that race affects perceptions of the context surrounding human rights abuses. Although white and black South Africans see the struggle over apartheid in entirely different terms, the processes through which they attribute blame do not differ a great deal. Once they are satisfied that the human rights abuses were committed by a leader, or harmed innocent people, or were without ideological motives, with only occasional exceptions South Africans of every race reach a judgment of blameworthiness.

31 Note that the unstandardized regression coefficients are the most appropriate for cross-group comparison.
The clearest finding from this analysis is that South Africans judge the MK and the Security Branch differently, ascribing more blame to the latter than the former. Two of the experimental manipulations—obedience and motives—were accurately perceived, with perceptions subsequently strongly influencing blame judgments. Leaders and those acting out of hatred are judged more harshly. The strongest influence on blame attributions—the perception of the harm done—is extremely racially charged. Blacks and whites differ enormously in their assessments of blame, even if they seem to rely upon similar considerations when forming judgments about blameworthiness. In the end, assessments of blame are quite predictable based upon the contextual factors examined here.

AMNESTY

We now have a reasonable understanding of how blame attributions are formed. But from the point of view of democratization in South Africa, perhaps more important are the questions of whether South Africans can forgive their political enemies and whether amnesty is a politically viable strategy. In this section, we consider more carefully the relationship between blame attributions and these other politically significant attitudes.

Table 7 examines the effect of race on attitudes toward amnesty. This table describes many aspects of attitudes toward the truth and reconciliation process. First, we report the views of each racial group toward each actor separately. Second, the first, third, and fifth data columns show the percentage of respondents who judge the actor blameworthy, are willing to forgive him, and support amnesty, respectively, in each group as a whole. The second and fourth data columns report the coefficients that result from regressing the two pairs of attitudes. We assume that blame attributions give rise to judgments about whether to forgive Phillip, and that forgiveness is associated with the willingness to extend amnesty. The data in Table 7 support some interesting conclusions.

Consider Africans first. As already noted, most blacks differentiate strongly between the human rights abuses of the ANC and of the state. When it comes to the Security Branch, most hold Phillip blameworthy, most would not forgive him, and most would deny him amnesty. The three sets of views are very strongly interconnected: Blame leads to unwillingness to forgive, which is associated with disapproval of amnesty. Views of the MK are exactly the opposite, even though the connections among the attitudes are quite similar. Most Africans would grant Phillip amnesty, either
because they do not blame him or because they are willing to forgive his transgressions.

Whites, as we have often noted, are the mirror image of blacks. Most blame the MK actor, would not forgive him, and would not extend amnesty to him. The three attitudes are also strongly interconnected. Concerning the Security Branch actor, most do not view him as blameworthy, would forgive him, and would award him amnesty. Although attitudes toward the state’s actor are less strongly interconnected among whites, for them as for blacks, blame leads to unwillingness to forgive, which undermines support for amnesty.

The most important respect in which the attitudes of Coloured South Africans and those of Asian origin differ is that, unlike blacks and whites, they do not differentiate much between the role of the actor. The proportion willing to grant Phillip amnesty is the same irrespective of whether he was working for the ANC or for the government. The interconnections among the attitudes are not as strong (especially among Coloured people), although in general blame is associated with unwillingness to forgive and to grant amnesty. In sum, the question of amnesty divides each of the racial groups, with the exception of Africans judging the MK and whites judging the Security Branch, where conflicting consensuses emerge.

CONCLUSION

Most South Africans claim to be committed to at least one of the basic principles of the truth and reconciliation process: There can be no reconciliation in South Africa unless people confess their apartheid crimes. In the 1996 survey, 68% of the respondents agreed or agreed strongly with this view; in 1997, the percentage was 69%. In both 1996 and 1997, however, a much smaller proportion had confidence that the TRC would achieve its purposes. When asked to evaluate the statement that “the Truth Commission will only end badly—therefore South Africans should look to the future and forget the past,” 45% agreed (somewhat or strongly) in 1996, and 42% held similar views in 1997. Thus, many seem to long for truth and reconciliation but are not very optimistic about the likelihood of coming to grips with South Africa’s apartheid past.32

One reason the truth and reconciliation process is unlikely to be very popular among ordinary South Africans has to do with the close connection people make between blame and punishment. Only a minority accepts the view that those clearly engaged in the violent struggle over apartheid should be awarded amnesty. Most consider these actions as criminal and deserving of punishment. To the extent that South Africans are willing to support amnesty, issues of blame must be mitigated and contextualized.

Some of the contextual factors recognized by the law are not supported by ordinary South Africans. In particular, the fact that victims were “combatants” rather than “innocent” people does little to exonerate the action in the eyes of most people. A large segment of the public does not agree with some of the basic premises of the truth and reconciliation legislation.

The truth and reconciliation process clearly has divided South Africa and promises to continue to do so in the future. For instance, the release of the final report of the TRC on October 29, 1998, generated a new storm of controversy and protest over the TRC and its activities, from every quarter, including the

32 Not unexpectedly, there are significant racial/ethnic differences on these two items. Black, Coloured, and Asian South Africans hold similar and relatively optimistic views, and whites have decidedly different and negative views toward the entire TRC process.
ANC. Moreover, the work of the commission is far from complete; it must still decide many amnesty cases, and the issue of reparations for victims has not yet been definitively resolved. Especially as it becomes clear to all that reparations will be pitifully small, the truth and reconciliation process promises to be a continuing source of dissatisfaction with the regime.

The most important question not addressed here is that of the consequences of the truth and reconciliation process for the legitimacy of law and, ultimately, of the South African political system. To date, the TRC has made few friends in South Africa. Many victims are still aggrieved, popular expectations of retributive justice are unmet, many see the commission’s work as a witch hunt, and the TRC has on several occasions done enormous damage to its own legitimacy (e.g., by granting blanket amnesty to the ANC leadership). Only those who have received amnesty seem pleased with the process. And the commission will surely stimulate controversy in the future. The country cannot afford significant reparations to the victims of human rights abuses, even if it has the political will to make such payments. South Africa must still confront the end of the Mandela era, as well as the continuing problems of crime and economic distress. The failure to provide retributive justice may well be seen as one more entry in a long list of inadequacies of the fledgling democracy. Amnesty may have been essential to avoid civil war during the democratic transition, but the odds against the bet that truth will beget reconciliation today or in the near future seem to be very substantial indeed.

We must be careful not to claim that the truth and reconciliation process will necessarily reduce the likelihood of democratic consolidation in South Africa. Obviously, the preferences and values of the mass public are only one variable in a large, complicated causal process of political transformation. But our results should nonetheless be unsettling for South African democrats. The success of a multiracial democracy in South Africa surely depends on the ability of people to put the past aside and compete freely for political power. New coalitions must be possible if the emerging hegemony of the ANC is to be contested, and those coalitions must be based at least in part on cooperative agreements among those who were victims and beneficiaries of apartheid. Two of our findings are particularly worrisome. First, considerable racial polarization exists around the truth and reconciliation process, with whites and blacks especially taking diametrically opposed views on blame and responsibility. Second, those whose blameworthiness is incontestable are highly unlikely to receive forgiveness. To grant amnesty to those who clearly engaged in gross human rights violations would be quite unpopular among ordinary South Africans, of all races and ethnicities. Thus, the truth and reconciliation process has some potential for undermining the legitimacy of the contemporary regime, especially respect for the rule of law, and particularly after the demise of Mandela. At some point, many South Africans want justice, not reconciliation, and justice within the fractured political landscape of the country is an extremely volatile concept.

APPENDIX A: QUESTION WORDING

The Experimental Vignette and Associated Judgments

33. Now I would like to tell you a short story and ask you some questions about how you feel about what happens in the story.

Note: Examples of the two most extreme versions of the vignette (i.e., experimental stimuli all hypothesized to create blame or all creating exoneration) are reported in the text. Two of the vignettes mixing the stimuli are:

STORY VERSION NO. 6
Phillip was a member of the Security Branch of the South African police. He was not a senior official in the organisation, and therefore had to take orders from others higher up in the organisation. As a result of his actions, people who were not directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by hatred towards those he killed.

STORY VERSION NO. 12
Phillip was a member of MK, the ANC's military wing. He was a senior official in the organisation, he gave orders that others had to follow. As a result of his actions, people who were directly involved in the struggle over apartheid were killed. Phillip says that his actions were motivated by hatred towards those he killed.

Now we have some questions about what you just heard in this story.

33a. First, think about whether or not you blame Phillip personally for what happened in this story. If 10 means that you completely blame Phillip for what happened and 1 means you don’t blame him at all, which number from 10 to 1 best describes how you feel?

1. Blameless
2. 3.
4. 5.
6. 7.
10. Completely to blame
98. DON'T KNOW
99. REFUSED

33b. Do you think Phillip should be punished for what happened in the story?

1. Yes
2. No
3. DON'T KNOW

33c. How much do you think Phillip should be punished?

1. Punished very severely

33 For accounts of the objections to the truth and reconciliation process, see Ngidi 1998. The Spring 1998 issue of Sisyphus is devoted to the TRC and provides several interesting articles quite critical of the process.
2. Punished but not severely
3. Punished only very lightly
4. DON'T KNOW
33d. Would you forgive Phillip for what happened in the story?
1. Yes
2. No
3. DON'T KNOW

33e. How much would you forgive Phillip?
1. I would definitely forgive him completely
2. I probably would forgive him
3. I might forgive him
4. DON'T KNOW

33f. Here is a list of words that might be used to describe Phillip. Taking them one at a time, please tell me how you feel about Phillip. The first pair of words is “brave” versus “cowardly.” If you consider Phillip to be extremely brave, tell me the number 10. If you think of Phillip as extremely cowardly, tell me the number 1. The numbers 2 through 9 represent increasing degrees of cowardliness.
1. Cowardly
2. Not believable
3. Engaging in criminal political actions
4. Not in control
5. Engaging in criminal actions
6. Was following orders
7. Did not harm innocent people
8. Was acting on his own initiative
9. Motivated by hatred
10. Motivated by belief he was right

33g. Finally, suppose Phillip’s case comes before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Should the TRC grant him amnesty for his actions?
1. Believe strongly amnesty should be granted
2. Amnesty should probably be granted
3. Amnesty should probably not be granted
4. Believe strongly amnesty should not be granted
5. DON'T KNOW

33h. Should Phillip’s victims be allowed to pursue legal action in the courts against him?
1. Definitely should be allowed
2. Probably should be allowed
3. Probably should not be allowed
4. Definitely should not be allowed
5. DON'T KNOW

APPENDIX B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE B-1. Manipulation Check</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A. Perceived Obedience by Obedience Manipulation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Story Version: Phillip is a . . .</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Follower</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In control of own actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was following orders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B. Perceived Harm to Innocents by Intentionality and Consequences Manipulation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Story Version: Phillip killed people . . .</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Not Involved in the Struggle</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not harm innocent people</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Perceived Actor Motives by Motive Manipulation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Story Version: Phillip was motivated by . . .</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivated by belief in rightness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>D. Goals and Roles Manipulation</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Version: Phillip was a member of . . .</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), ANC</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believable</td>
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<tr>
<td>In control of own actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging in criminal action</td>
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<td>Motivated by belief in rightness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was following orders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not harm innocent people</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each variable in the left stub column is measured on a 0–1 scale
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