

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

UNESCO CHAIR

on Education for Human Rights,
Democracy and Peace

UNESCO/UNITWIN Award 2002



**WRITING THE HISTORY OF VIOLENCE ANEW: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND
RECONCILIATION THROUGH CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE**

**MASTER THESIS BY CATERINA SIRNA
SUPERVISED BY PROFESSOR DIMITRIOS E. AKRIVOULIS
2012-2013**



*European Master's Degree
in Human Rights and Democratisation*



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*“With my heart in my throat
tonight I’ll sing:
the story of her hands
which were sea sparrows.
I’ll sing her eyes as charming waves
gliding on the edge of the evenings.
I’ll sing until you’ll break down,
and you’ll give me her back.
But after having won the sky
and beaten the hell
I’ll look back at her
and I’ll leave her at the night
and at the winter.
I’ll turn because
I saw the frost
taking her life.
And myself now
no anyone else
will say it's over.
Dreaming girls are
waiting for me to make
my heart dancing again
because not everything you cry
is always love.”*

*(“Euridice”
Vecchioni R.)*

*Relief by
Arno Breker, Orpheus and Euridyce
(1944, Breker-Museum).*

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To my little Lorenzo

So that you can play with your little cars as long as possible.

Abstract

This research attempts to explore the possibilities of rethinking the mechanism of transitional justice within a new framework stemming from psychological and social science. Rather than focusing on the debate whether it is better to punish or to forgive past wrongdoings, it points out the necessity of fully respecting the memory of suffering in order to create a healing narrative. As victims of mass atrocities or totalitarian regimes are told to be unique and qualitative different from victims of ordinary crimes, my research has attempted to shed a light to those mechanisms within transitional justice, which better respond to the need of victims. Supported by new researches in the field of psychology and social science, my thesis states that neither the court nor a non-judicial system can offer a complete sense of justice after mass atrocities. However, this does not mean that a post-conflict society does not need legal intervention in terms of accountability. It implies instead another important assumption: peace and stability can be obtained when truth has been fully disclosed and historicized. In this sense, the government of a society in transition has the duty to adopt any instrument that would allow the construction of a shared narrative and memory, which has a healing effect in the long run. Within this new paradigm, reconciliation aimed by transitional justice becomes a concrete amount of emotions, attitudes and behavior, which can be measured. Reconciliation is thus seen as equal neither to forgetting, nor to forgiving, nor even to a diminished sense of vengeance. It is seen instead as a *making-sense* process of one's own story through the story of another. The narratives of children becomes precious and equally important to the adult's own in this process. In this respect, the work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission child-friendly version in Sierra Leone is notable in this effort to create a new narrative of war, where understanding the past and promoting hope for a better future will allow to *never again* commit the same mistakes of the past.

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