

Religious and political discourse in Argentina: the case of reconciliation



Discourse & Society

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SAGE Publications

(Los Angeles, London, New Delhi,

Singapore and Washington DC)

www.sagepublications.com

Vol 20(3): 327–343

10.1177/0957926509102403

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ABSTRACT This article analyzes the nominalization ‘reconciliation’ as a grammar metaphor that allows for the understanding of the historical relationships between religious and political discourse in Argentina. In order to do this, we will analyze the case of the publication of the *Final Document of the Military Junta on the Fight against Terrorism and Subversion*, in 1983, and its subsequent interpretations made by political and religious actors in terms of its adequacy or inadequacy to the Catholic proposal of *reconciliation*, which would later become a legal argument in the penal trials sustained against human rights violators. We will observe two relevant features: (a) a struggle about the experiential meaning concealed by the nominalization that legitimates or, on the contrary, de-legitimizes the repressive action of the Military Junta; (b) an implicit consensus that attributes to Catholic discourse the power to dictate the rules of political life, which has severely restrained the autonomy of political democratic actors.

KEY WORDS: *Argentina, nominalization, political discourse, reconciliation, religious discourse*

Introduction

On 24 March 1976, Jorge R. Videla, Emilio E. Massera and Orlando R. Agosti proclaimed the sixth military coup in 45 years of fragile political life in Argentina, overthrowing the administration of María Estela Martínez de Perón, widow and vice-president of the then recently deceased, democratically elected president Juan Domingo Perón. Although authoritarianism was a familiar feature of the exercise of political power, this dictatorship was the most ferocious one in the implementation of a repressive system that consisted of the illegal kidnapping, torture and murder of political opponents. The increasing number of victims of State terrorism, currently estimated at 30,000 people, together with the public

campaigns of the people exiled for political reasons and the reports made by national and international human rights organizations, gave birth to a new social–political–cultural category: the *desaparecido*. The 30,000 *desaparecidos* in Argentina are, nowadays, the most dramatic argument in favour of democracy and the trade mark of the dictatorship inaugurated in 1976.

When, between 1981 and 1983, the legitimacy of exercise of the military government started to diminish, a word came to be in vogue as a proposal for the transition towards democracy: *reconciliación*. This is neither an Argentine invention nor an absolutely original Latin-American characteristic; some years later it would be employed to name the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, in South-Africa, presided over by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and, even later, it was employed in Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Paraguay and other countries that suffered similar processes of State terrorism. In Argentina, as well as in the rest of these countries, the term was first employed by the Catholic episcopacy.

What does ‘reconciliation’ mean? What did it mean to the social and political actors involved in the transition? It was employed by actors from different social and political affiliations to sustain diverse, and often opposed, statements: from the military forces defending their repressive strategy to the human rights organizations denouncing it. It was employed by President Alfonsín in 1983 to legitimate the investigations of human rights violations but also by President Menem in 1990 to validate the general pardons (*indultos*) given to the very same military governors. It was also exploited both by prosecutors and defendants in the trials held during 1985, two years later, to legitimate but also to criticize the so-called ‘impunity laws’ which severely restricted the trials against the human rights violators. Furthermore, almost 20 years later, it was used to invalidate both laws and to re-start the legal processes against military repressors.

In this sense, *reconciliación* is not just a term or a mere interesting lexicogrammatical realization; it crystallizes a political and social process that is still dramatically criss-crossing Argentine society.

The aim of this article is to understand the conflictive emergence of the proposal of reconciliation in the historical context of transition towards democracy in 1983. Therefore, from a methodological point of view, we will introduce a case study (Stake, 1995) to understand the foundational ambiguity that made the *reconciliación* an object of political struggle, an argument for political and legal fights between the defendants of human rights violations and those that condemned them and made every possible effort to take them to court and do justice. Thus, we shall first analyze the grammatical features of the term as a *nominalization*, whose structural ambiguity (Halliday, 1998) sustains equally congruent, opposite interpretations and, therefore, argumentations. We will then analyze the case of the publication of the *Documento Final de la Junta Militar sobre la Lucha contra el Terrorismo y la Subversión* (Final Document of the Military Junta on the Fight against Terrorism and Subversion) on 28 April 1983 and its interpretations in the light of the Catholic proposal of *reconciliación*.

Catholicism and politics in Argentina: a presentation of the case

The relationship between Catholicism and politics in Argentina can be traced throughout the whole of 20th-century history until the military coup overthrew the democratic president Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930. This event may be characterized as a military–civic–religious coup (Mallimaci, 1992) in which a long-term alliance between ‘the cross and the sword’ was sealed.

This event was the beginning of a double process of ‘Catholization of Military Forces and Militarization of Civil Society’ (Mallimaci, 1995), which produced the conformation of what historians call the ‘Myth of the Catholic Nation’ (Zanatta, 1996), the symbolic reverse of a political–religious strategy consisting of a double action on both the political and economical elites and masses (Soneira, 1989). Therefore, a huge and complex Catholic device extended all through Argentine society, colonizing legal and economical privileges and religious education at all levels, and instructing Catholic leaders in the military forces, and in political parties, labour unions, enterprises, students’ unions, and artistic as well as intellectual circles. As a result of this process, Catholicism and nationality became a single identity, establishing religious criteria of citizenship, extended into a massive shared system of beliefs (Mallimaci, 1995).

Although this phenomenon was a central component in organizing and legitimating the long series of authoritarian military coups in Argentina (Rouquié, 1978), it also produced anti-establishment, left-wing movements in the 1960s that combined Catholicism with socialism and even communism, not only in Argentina but also in Latin-America (Löwy, 1998). As a result, as Donatello (2005) shows, much of the political struggle in the 1960s and the 1970s can be fairly understood as a political–religious struggle in terms of confronted political and religious projects.

The military dictatorship established on 24 March 1976 claimed that its function was to ‘restore the values of our society, which is Occidental and Christian’. The *de facto* president, Jorge Rafael Videla, legitimated his authoritarian government on religious bases:

La Argentina es un país occidental y cristiano, no porque esté escrito así en el aeropuerto de Ezeiza; la Argentina es occidental y cristiana porque viene de su historia. Es por defender esa condición como estilo de vida que se planteó esta lucha contra quienes no aceptaron ese sistema de vida y quisieron imponer otro distinto.

(*La Prensa*, 18 December 1977)

Argentina is a Western and Christian country, not because it is so written at Ezeiza airport; Argentina is Western and Christian because of its history. To defend this condition as a way of life, those who did not accept this system and wanted to impose a different one were fought.

At the same time, the organizations and groups that confronted the dictatorship had a similar Catholic-oriented discourse, making use of the shared system of beliefs and social networks that began in the 1930s. When the military forces’

repressive strategy of kidnapping, torture and murder became more visible, the human rights organizations emerged precisely in Catholic circles (cf. Catoggio and Mallimaci, 2008). At the same time that bishops like Adolfo Tortolo were blessing the repressive action of the Army, other bishops, like Jaime de Nevares, were denouncing the human rights violations of the military government (Mignone, 1986).

The dictatorship had a widespread legitimacy of exercise until at least 1980, when the geometrical growth of inflation and unemployment, as well as the international pressure on human rights issues,¹ began to diminish the power of the government (Novaro and Palermo, 2003). After the unsuccessful attempt to regain sovereignty over the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) from the United Kingdom in April 1982, the transition towards democracy became a first-order issue on the political, as well as social, agenda.

Within this context, the military government announced free elections for December 1983. Amongst the political measures taken to prepare the military retirement from power, it also announced a report on the repressive strategy and, later, a complete amnesty law concerning the 'fight against subversion' in Argentina. One week before the publication of the report, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops spread a document entitled 'At the present time of the country' (*En la hora actual del país*), whose main aim was 'to pray for national reconciliation'.

This prayer or, rather, as many newspapers pragmatically designated it, this 'call' for reconciliation² was not only appropriated by political and military actors, it was also one of the main arguments employed one week later to disqualify – but also to legitimate – the *Final Document of the Military Junta on the Fight Against Terrorism and Subversion* (FD). This *Documento Final* . . . was meant to close the issue of the *desaparecidos*; in it, the military government stated that the whole country had been involved in a war and that: (a) the *desaparecidos* were to be considered legally dead; (b) they had died in legitimate battles; (c) the military involved in this 'war' were to be considered patriotic heroes who saved the country from the 'international subversion'.

The immediate reactions to the political and religious actors were contradictory and controversial. Although we find some supporters of the legitimacy of the *Documento Final*, . . . we observe a general reject manifested in the press, in which these actors made of this *reconciliation* the main argument to de-legitimize it. And, in the case of its supporters, we see exactly the same operation. This phenomenon was perceived by several early discourse analysis studies on the dictatorship in Argentina, especially those of Lavandera (1986) and Menéndez (1986). The latter, in fact, is devoted to the comparative analysis of two official Catholic texts on the *Documento Final* by the Argentine Episcopacy and the Commission for Peace and Justice of the laity, showing two ideologically confronted interpretations concealed in an apparent consensus. Nevertheless, despite the importance attributed by both authors to the problem of *reconciliation*, there is not, as far as we know, a systematical analysis of its discursive features. Here, we will try to answer the next questions: What grammatical features made these contradictory uses of the same term possible? What were the terms of

the confrontation? And, finally, were there any shared characteristics in both supporters and critics of the *Documento Final*? We shall argue that one significant key to answer these questions is to be found in the nominalization *reconciliación*.

Reconciliation as a grammatical metaphor

There is no single way to understand this case, let alone the discursive features of the struggle for human rights in the transition towards democracy in Argentina. However, given our main focus on the relationship between Catholicism and politics, and the particular importance of the term *reconciliación* in the last 25 years, we can approach this phenomenon from the classical and still relevant point of view of nominalization analysis as studied by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Martin, 1993; Halliday, 1994, 1998).

When Halliday (1994: 342–3) discusses the realization of grammatical metaphor, he distinguishes two main types: ideational (metaphors of transitivity) and interpersonal ones (metaphors of mood, including modality). To understand the former, he assumes that there is a congruent relationship between the components of the transitivity system and lexicogrammatical categories. Therefore, processes are congruently expressed by verbs, entities by nouns and qualities by adjectives. An ideational metaphor is produced whenever the semantic components of transitivity are not realized by their congruent word class. On the other hand, interpersonal meanings – concerning modality and mood – also have a default realization by means of modal elements that occur within the clause structure (Taverniers, 2006).

Nominalization, as ‘the single most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor’ (Halliday, 1994: 352), has a particular interest for Discourse Analysis³ because it ‘packages’ (Halliday and Martin, 1993: 131) information concerning clause as representation. Therefore, processes, entities and properties are not congruently realized by verbs, nouns and adjectives but reworded as a single nominal group. Transposed to ideological analysis:

Nominalization is a resource for generalizing, for abstracting for particular events and series of events . . . such generalization and abstraction, for example in the genres of governance, can erase or even suppress difference. It can also obfuscate agency, and therefore responsibility, and social divisions.

(Fairclough, 2003: 144)

Although it is possible to maintain the arguments of the verb, they will no longer be congruent, because grammatical metaphor ‘changes the semantic structure or the clause, so that it no longer corresponds to an event structure in which a typically animate actor engages in processes under particular circumstances, with these actions affecting an entity’ (Koller and Davidson, 2008: 314).

It has been argued that there is not necessarily an ideological effect of mystification attached to nominalizations (Goatly, 1996; Widdowson, 2000: 165–6; O’Halloran, 2003: 115; Billig, 2008a, 2008b) following two main arguments: (1) that it is syntactically possible to elicit information omitted by means of grammatical metaphor; (2) that the aspects of the processes that are left unspecified do not entail any mystificatory effect as far as they are part of

the knowledge of the addressee.⁴ Many authors disagree with this statement (see Schleppegrell, 1996; Weber, 2002; Pinto, 2007; Fairclough, 2008; Martin, 2008; Van Dijk, 2008) and this argument can be summarized as follows: (1) although it is possible to elicit the information omitted: (a) it is not necessary; and (b) it nevertheless changes the transitivity configuration of the congruent clause; (2) the assumption of shared knowledge is, in itself, an ideologically relevant feature.

In addition to this kind of criticism to the widespread use of nominalization in Discourse Analysis, there is still another argument, probably deeper, that attains to the object analyzed:

although it is a semantic fact that nominalisation leaves aspects of the process unspecified, it does not follow at all that its pragmatic *effect* is necessarily to conceal such specification. Effect is a matter of reader response, and although we might not know who or what is doing the shedding, the readers of *The Lancaster Guardian* (from which the headline was taken) probably do.

(Widdowson, 2000: 165)

Weber's reply ('One wonders how Widdowson can guess so confidently what readers of *The Lancaster Guardian* "probably" do or do not know'; Weber, 2002: 158) does not answer the question still open about the effects actually produced. In fact, even Halliday falls into the temptation of 'wondering': 'The writer presumably knows exactly what it [the nominalization] means; but the reader may not' (Halliday, 1994: 353).

Both remarks shift the focus on how nominalization works in the *tenor* variable of register (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999: 140–4) or, in other words, how it realizes interpersonal meanings. We would like to stress two different features: one grammatical and the other methodological.

From a grammatical point of view, besides the experiential meaning that is omitted in nominalization, interpersonal information like *tense*, *mood* and *modality* also disappears (García Negroni et al., 2005). For example:

The Argentines must reconcile among themselves

In this kind of clause, we can observe an interpersonal grammar metaphor of mood: while the congruent realization of a command is the imperative, in this example, it is expressed by the modal auxiliary verb 'must' (Taverniers, 2006). If we nominalize the process, we can obtain several different clauses like:

Argentine reconciliation is needed

The Argentines' reconciliation is required

Argentine reconciliation has been achieved

I know how to achieve the Argentine reconciliation

Argentine reconciliation is difficult

Here, we observe that, besides the different ways of "unpacking" the process' arguments, the *command* mood – realized metaphorically – has disappeared;⁵ even more, from 'reconciliation' itself, it is impossible to extract not only the experiential meanings of the realized 'original' clause, but also the interpersonal ones.

Therefore, inasmuch as there is an ideological motivation for the omission and, in the addressee, actualization of the agents and circumstances ‘packed’ in nominalizations, there is a similar pattern about the tense and, especially, the mood and modality of the nominalized clause. In other terms, besides the experiential question about *who must reconcile with whom*, the following questions underlie: Why should any given subject think that ‘Argentine reconciliation’ is a process that *must* take place? Who says so? We will try to give an answer in the following section.

From a methodological point of view, it is necessary to analyze not only the Catholic texts that proposed *reconciliation*, but also the different interpretations produced by diverse social actors. This decision is based on two theoretical assumptions.

The first one recalls the argument of Guillén Galve (1998), who proves the existence of ‘dynamic grammatical metaphors’, i.e. nominalizations that establish intertextual relationships with previous non-metaphorical texts that allow for the ‘unpacking’ of experiential information. In the case of *reconciliation*, we will observe a process of the same nature: the nominalization evokes intertextually previous models realized in the doctrinal corpus of the Roman Catholic Church.

This statement entails the second assumption of our analysis. As the intertextual model is not questioned but, on the contrary, it is taken as valid and legitimate, texts that contend by the legitimate interpretation of *reconciliation* enter the interdiscursivity (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) of Catholic discourse. Therefore, the struggle between political actors develops *within* the Catholic field, and *under* the legitimacy of bishops.

Hence, our working hypothesis can be formulated in the following terms: the term *reconciliation* has been proposed by the Catholic episcopacy in Argentina as a way to create an apparent consensus, although the different political actors, and even the bishops as individuals, may – and, in fact, do – fight for the experiential meaning of the nominalization *reconciliación*. Implicitly, all of them agree with its interpersonal meaning: that bishops are the right agents to dictate/state what Argentine political society *must* do. In other terms, while political actors struggle for the experiential meaning of *reconciliation*, all of them subordinate their arguments to religious authority. The explicit dissent about the contents of reconciliation conceals an implicit consensus about Catholic political power.

Reconciliarse as a verb

The nominalization *reconciliation* is grammatically ambiguous, because it can be interpreted as referring to three different processes:

- (1) Juan reconcilió a María y Pedro
Juan reconciled Mary with Peter
- (2) Pedro y María se reconciliaron
Peter and Mary became reconciled
- (3) Pedro se reconcilió con María
Peter reconciled himself to Mary

The verb 'reconciliar(se)' represents, therefore, three different types of process, involving different transitivity features. In (1), its experiential meaning can be formalized as follows:

(1) Juan (AGENT) reconcilió (PROCESS) a María y Pedro (BENEFICIARY)

In (2), we observe a case that Arús (2006) classifies as a *transitive reciprocal pronominal 'se' construction*:

(2) Pedro y María (AGENT) se (BENEFICIARY) reconciliaron (PROCESS)

In (3), we observe a third transitivity configuration:

(3) Pedro (AGENT) se (BENEFICIARY) reconcilió (PROCESS) con Maria (GOAL)

Together with the grammatical features of these cases,⁶ we observe that 'reconciliación', as a nominalization, does not allow us to 'unpack' unambiguously what kind of process and participants are involved: in (1), it is the unidirectional action of an agent carried out for two beneficiaries; in (2), it is the reciprocal activity of two agents that, simultaneously, become beneficiaries of each other's action; and in (3), it means the action of an agent that is benefited by the action carried out for another person.

The national reconciliation: transposed religious discourse

The intertextual source of the term *reconciliation* in Catholic discourse can be found in the main body of the Church's institutional belief system: the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). In this document, *reconciliation* designates one of the 'sacraments of healing', specifically the 'sacrament of penance and reconciliation' (CCC: 1423–98). Its function is:

To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men.
(CCC: 1489)

The transitive configuration that underlies this sacrament responds to the (3) model: the sinner (agent) reconciles (process) himself (beneficiary) to God (goal) (CCC: 1484). Therefore, the agent has a series of liturgically prescribed steps to fulfil to attain a successful reconciliation, known as 'The acts of the Penitent': Contrition (CCC: 1451–4), the Confession of sins (CCC: 1455–8) and Satisfaction (1459–60).

On 23 April 1983, when public opinion was waiting for the *Final Document of the Military Junta on the Fight against Terrorism and Subversion* by the military government, the Argentine Conference of Bishops produced a political version of the sacrament, stating that:

La Reconciliación nacional ha sido centro de nuestra enseñanza pastoral en los últimos años . . . la Reconciliación con Dios obtenida para los hombres por Jesucristo, debe ser asumida, a través de la historia, por cada uno de nosotros. Ello implica el reconocimiento de los propios yerros en toda su gravedad, la detestación de los mismos, el propósito firme de no cometerlos más, la reparación del mal causado mediante obras de penitencia y la adopción de una conducta totalmente nueva.

(En la hora actual del país, 2, 3)

National Reconciliation has been the centre of our pastoral teaching in the past years . . . Reconciliation with God, obtained for men by means of Jesus Christ, is to be assumed by each of us in the course of history. This entails the recognition of one's own mistakes in all their gravity, their detestation, the firm intention of no longer falling into them, the repair of the evil caused by means of works of penitence and the adoption of a totally new form of behaviour.

Although the mentioned process is always realized in its nominalized form, we can observe here the steps commanded by the Catechism, as a clue to 'unpack' the nominalization in the (3) model, in terms of the sacrament of reconciliation. Moreover, the emphasis of the text is not so much on the 'divine' component of the process as it is on the human *activity* that should be done 'in the course of history by each of us'. Here we can observe a key feature of episcopal discourse: the agency of the process is highly mitigated, either by a collectivization of agency ('each of us') or by the omission of the agent. The latter is clearly observable in the nominalizations employed to avoid the designation of an agent of the process of acknowledging, detesting, proposing, repairing and adopting a new form of behaviour.

As we have shown in previous research (Bonnin, 2008), mitigation of the agency is a key feature of episcopal discourse, together with abstraction and ambiguity.⁷ The reason for this can be found in: (a) the heterogeneous ideological composition of episcopacy, which compels bishops to negotiate a discourse that is ambiguous enough to include their different positions; (b) the similarly heterogeneous ideological composition of the audience of its texts, which can actualize the abstract positions presented in different concrete terms.

In this case, the shift from *Reconciliation with God* to *National Reconciliation* involves a politization of religious discourse that is left unexplained. Even though the nominalization explicitly involves all the Argentines – 'each of us' – the implicit clause structure requires two different participants: one that embodies the roles of agent and beneficiary, and the other one that is the goal of the process. If the penitent has *sinned*, which is its equivalent in political terms? If the penitent relates to God, who should a political sinner relate to? And, moreover, who are the political sinners in Argentina? Which was their political sin? The answers to these questions are to be found in the subsequent texts that struggled to establish the meaning of a *legitimate* reconciliation.

The Documento Final and the reconciliación

Five days later, on 28 April 1983, the Military Junta broadcast the *Documento Final* on TV and radio. In addition to other discursive features that have already been studied, we can observe here a particular use of the term *reconciliation* as a way of 'unpacking' (Halliday, 1998: 206–8) the nominalization in Catholic terms:

Quienes han reconocido su error, y han purgado sus culpas, merecen ayuda. La sociedad argentina, en su generosidad, está dispuesta a recuperarlos en su seno. La reconciliación es el comienzo difícil de una era de madurez y de responsabilidad asumidas con realismo por todos. Las cicatrices son memoria dolorosa, pero también

cimiento de una democracia fuerte, de un pueblo unido y libre. Un pueblo que aprendió que la subversión y el terrorismo son la muerte inexorable de la libertad.

(‘Documento Final de la Junta Militar sobre la Lucha contra el Terrorismo y la Subversión’, *La Prensa*, 29 April 1983)

Those who have recognized their mistake, and have purged their sins, deserve to be helped. The Argentine society, out of its generosity, will be eager to welcome them. The reconciliation is the difficult starting point of an age of maturity and of responsibility assumed with realism by everybody. The scars are a painful memory, but also the foundation of a strong democracy, of a united and free people, who have learned that subversion and terrorism entail the inexorable death of freedom.

In this argumentative use of *reconciliation*, the roles are clearly distributed within the sacramental model imposed by the episcopacy. The ‘subversives’ and ‘terrorists’ have ‘sinned’ against the Argentine society. Therefore, although it is not explicitly stated, we can infer from the immediate constituents of the text an implicit clause that follows this pattern:

The subversives (agent) must reconcile (process) themselves (beneficiary) to Argentine society (goal).

The interpersonal metaphor of the imperative mood in the modal auxiliary ‘must’, if not grammatically necessary, is essential to the acceptability of the clause, whose indicative form would be anomalous:

The subversives reconcile themselves to Argentine society.

Why is it not acceptable? Because its declarative form assumes that the process of reconciliation has already taken place, which would mean that the *Documento Final* or the subsequent Amnesty Law would be unnecessary. Consequently, the process of *reconciliation* is taken as something that *must* take place in the future, ‘unpacking’ mood information from the grammatical metaphor that cannot be linguistically inferred (Halliday, 1998: 206–8). In other words, even if grammatically unnecessary, there is an ideological motivation for the interpretation of *reconciliation* as a command.

On the next day, some political actors rejected the *Documento Final*, especially based on the argument that it did not follow the necessary requisites for the *national reconciliation*. Some of these actors had an explicit Catholic identity, like Martín Dip, from the Christian Democratic Party, who stated:

Ese documento no se encuadra en el marco que la Iglesia Católica ha ofrecido para hacer posible la reconciliación, que justamente ha de estar basada en la verdad, la justicia y el perdón.

(‘Aislamiento político del país’, *La Prensa*, 29 April 1983)

This document does not assume the frame that the Catholic Church has offered to make reconciliation possible. Reconciliation must be based on truth, justice and forgiveness

Raúl Alfonsín, founder of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (*Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos*), published a particularly

resonant statement entitled 'It is not the last word' (*No es la palabra final*). He, then presidential candidate for the Civic Radical Union (*Unión Cívica Radical*) and later elected president, held a position against the military government. During his administration, he created the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (*Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas*), and so Argentina became the first Latin-American state that judged the human rights crimes committed during the dictatorship.⁸ Therefore, his statement on the *Documento Final* has a particular relevance to an understanding of the later political course of the term. The document states:

El consenso invocado [por el gobierno militar] estuvo lejos de ser general . . . son bien conocidas las declaraciones de la Iglesia y de otras instituciones representativas en igual sentido . . . Finalmente, es necesario señalar que la reconciliación que se pretende no puede apoyarse en un documento como el analizado, donde no se advierte un genuino propósito de enmienda sino una velada amenaza de reiterar las actitudes del pasado, desatendiendo incluso los recientes requerimientos del Episcopado.

('No es la palabra final', *La Prensa*, 29 April 1983)

The invoked consensus [by the military government] was far from being widespread . . . There are well-known declarations of the Church and of other representative institutions which follow the same line of thought . . . Finally, it is necessary to indicate that the reconciliation being claimed cannot rely on a document like the one analyzed here, where there is no genuine intention of amendment, but a partial threat to repeat the actions of the past, even disregarding the recent requirements of the Episcopate.

We can recognize here two significant features concerning the political functioning of the term *reconciliation*. In the first place, the Catholic Church is evoked as an early critical institution of the military government and, in this sense, a legitimate and *representative* institution of Argentine society. In the second place, the nominalization *reconciliación* is featured once again in the sacramental model, but this time the agents are not 'the subversives', but the Military Junta. As in the case of the *Documento Final*, the process appears only in its nominalized form, but the immediate constituents of the text suggest the inference of a comparable implicit clause:

The Military Junta (agent) must reconcile (process) itself (beneficiary) to Argentine society (goal).

In as much as the Junta does not follow the steps required by the Catholic doctrine and, furthermore, the episcopal document, because 'there is not a genuine intention of amendment', the *Documento Final* is evaluated by Alfonsín as illegitimate. Again, the implicit clause 'unpacked' from the nominalization maintains a metaphorical imperative mood; the concerned participants, however, are different. We can observe here the development of an experiential struggle to designate the participants of the reconciliation but, on the other hand, an interpersonal consensus around the authority of the episcopacy.

The many reconciliations of Catholic bishops

It could be argued that political actors struggled with the military government on the experiential meaning of *reconciliation* while it represents a consensus for Catholic bishops. It could even be claimed that, not belonging to the religious field, political actors manipulated Catholic discourse for their own goals. However, the individual speeches of the bishops show the same diversity, and the same interpretative polarization.

These undetermined interpretations, which may obviously benefit the episcopacy, because they legitimize it before different and even opposing auditoriums, also reflect the heterogeneous composition of the episcopacy itself. Therefore, the same opposite experiential interpretation of the nominalization can be seen in the individual speeches held by bishops.

If we take an average right-wing bishop like Antonio Quarracino as an example, who legitimated the military government and later became the main religious accomplice of the neoliberal government of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989–1999), we can identify the same transitivity configuration as in the *Documento Final*:

El Informe Final fue elaborado con cuidado, es valiente y está bien hecho . . . es un verdadero paso para la reconciliación nacional.

(*Clarín*, 2 April 1983)

¿Quién tendrá en cuenta a los responsables intelectuales o morales de la huida a la clandestinidad de los guerrilleros y – en definitiva – a los responsables de la muerte de tanta gente joven? ¿Quién se haría cargo de algunos educadores y padres que de alguna manera encaminaron con sus lecciones y sus ejemplos a los jóvenes a una violencia inaceptable?

(Quarracino, 'Monseñor Quarracino teme que ciertos temas ocasionen un envenenamiento', *La Prensa*, 3 April 1983)

The Final Report was carefully elaborated; it is straightforward and well written . . . it represents a real step for national reconciliation.

Who will account for those intellectually or morally responsible for the clandestinization of the guerrillas and – ultimately – for the persons in charge of the death of so many young people? Who would be in charge of certain teachers and parents who somehow directed the youth, with their lessons and examples, towards unacceptable violence?

In Quarracino's discourse, the agent that held the responsibility of political sin – and, therefore, the one that must be the agent of the process – is more related to the subversion – as in the military discourse – than to the military forces. Thus, the 'intellectual or moral responsibility of the guerrilla . . . for the death of so many young people', the 'teachers and parents who somehow directed the youth . . . towards unacceptable violence', are the ones who have 'politically sinned' and, as a result, they are the required agents for the process of reconciling.

On the other hand, however, we may find bishops actively involved in the human rights movement who questioned the *Documento Final* precisely from

the point of view of *reconciliation*. We may find people like Miguel Esteban Hesayne, who stated in an open letter to Jorge Rafael Videla:

Ud. recomienda leer el informe de las Fuerzas Armadas 'en el marco' de la Declaración del Episcopado argentino (. . .) Nuestra Declaración hace un llamado a la reconciliación que implica: 'El reconocimiento de los propios yerros en toda su gravedad, la detestación de los mismos, el propósito firme de no cometerlos más, la reparación del mal causado y la adopción de una conducta totalmente nueva'. En este marco, de ninguna manera se encuadra el documento de las Fuerzas Armadas, porque visto desde allí es falso, inmoral e hipócrita.

Es falso, porque no dice toda la verdad posible. ¿Acaso Ud. no conoce, como nosotros, que las Fuerzas Armadas han violado sistemáticamente los elementales derechos del hombre . . .? Es inmoral, porque se basa en el principio de que el fin justifica los medios; doctrina siempre rechazada por la Iglesia . . . Es hipócrita, porque usando el lenguaje cristiano del amor, la fe, la reconciliación, la comprensión, la piedad y el perdón, [el Documento Final] lo vacía de contenido.

(Así califica monseñor Hesayne al documento, en una carta a Videla'
La Prensa, 6 May 1983)

You are recommended to read the report of the Armed Forces 'within the frame' of the Declaration of the Argentine Episcopate . . . Our Declaration makes a call for reconciliation that implies: 'the recognition of one's own mistakes in all their gravity, their detestation, the firm intention of no longer falling into them, the repair of the evil caused by means of works of penitence and the adoption of a totally new form of behaviour'. Within this frame, the document of the Army does not fit at all, because from this viewpoint it is false, immoral and hypocritical.

It is false, because it does not tell the truth. Don't you know, as we do, that the Armed Forces have systematically violated basic human rights . . .? It is immoral, because it is based on the principle that the ends justify the means; a doctrine always rejected by the Church . . . It is hypocritical because the use of the Christian language of love, faith, reconciliation, understanding, piety and forgiveness, [the Final Document] empties its contents.

Along the same lines as Alfonsín's declaration, Hesayne states that the *Documento Final* is not legitimate because the military forces do not take the responsibility of reconciling; in other terms, because the military do not become the agents of the sacramental model of reconciliation, which should follow the steps prescribed in the Catechism and its political transposition in the episcopal document. Furthermore, like Alfonsín, the Military Junta and Quarracino, he keeps the interpersonal imperative mood. The lack of legitimacy is due to the inadequacy of the *Documento Final* to accomplish the command of reconciliation. The experiential meaning is, thus, the object of confronted interpretations. On the other hand, the interpersonal one, concerning the authority of the Catholic episcopacy to dictate the legitimate rules for political transition towards democracy in Argentina, remains untouched.

Final remarks: religious restraints to political democracy in Argentina

These first struggles for the experiential meaning of *reconciliation* have been repeated for the past 25 years. As we have outlined at the beginning of this article, the confrontation developed in almost all these cases *within* Catholic discourse, even when judging priests involved in human rights violations.

Outside Argentina, the ex-bishop and current president of Paraguay, Fernando Lugo, has called for a 'National Reconciliation' based upon penal trials of the military forces involved in illegal repression during the dictatorship of Stroessner in that country. This evokes the model: 'The military forces must reconcile Paraguayan society.' At the same time, in Argentina, the ex-candidate for presidency, Alberto Rodríguez Saá, called, in 2007, for a National Reconciliation that was meant to stop the current action against the military involved in human rights violations.

These contemporary cases have three features in common with the one that we have analyzed here: (1) a shared system of beliefs and social networks provided historically by Catholicism; (2) an ideological struggle for the representations of *who* is responsible for the 'political sin' and, therefore, should be the agent of the process of *reconciliation*; and (3) an ideological consensus about the mood 'packed' in the nominalization that turns it into a command, which attributes to the Catholic Church the interpersonal power to dictate public policies.

As we have seen, the privileged status assigned to the Catholic Church as political authority means a strong restraint to democratic participation, not because Catholic discourse is 'progressive' or 'conservative', but because it fulfils a political role with a religious identity. A recent survey on Argentines' beliefs (Mallimaci et al., 2008) shows that the most entrusted institution in the country is the Catholic Church, which doubles the trust given to the Executive, Judiciary and Legislative powers. As long as this situation remains unchallenged, political democracy will remain restrained by religious criteria in Argentina, and an independent pluralistic political system will remain impracticable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Irene Vasilachis de Gialdino, Ann Montemayor-Borsinger and Clarena Guillo, who have read earlier versions of this article and enriched it with their observations.

NOTES

1. The Nobel Peace Prize of 1980 was awarded to Leonardo Pérez Esquivel, an Argentine Catholic human rights leader who was exiled from Argentina after political detention.
2. Lavandera (1986: 39) states that 'the reconciliation issue becomes the political centre of repercussion of the *Documento Final* in the editorials of at least two important newspapers' (my translation).

3. About nominalization in Critical Discourse Analysis, see the recent debate in *Discourse & Society* 19(6).
4. In a different direction, Billig (2008a) extends his criticisms on nominalization analysis to Critical Discourse Analysis as a whole. We will avoid entering this debate here.
5. From a different perspective, Simon-Vanderbergen (2003) shows how verbal process metaphors *realize* interpersonal meaning.
6. For a Systemic Functional interpretation of 'se', see Arús (2006).
7. The same observation is made by Menéndez (1986) in his comparative analysis of 'lays' and 'bishops' discourse.
8. However, as we have briefly stated before, the so-called 'impunity laws' of 1986 and 1987 permitted the escape from prison of the greater number of criminal military involved in repression.

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