

The Nature and Appropriateness of Forgiveness Requests

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SUMMARY

What might motivate us to make forgiveness requests? What is the nature of these requests? Are forgiveness requests always appropriate? These are the three main questions I take up in this dissertation.

I begin by claiming that the emotive and relational accounts of forgiveness do not sufficiently answer the first question. However, the practice-based account does. Thus, I argue that requesters are motivated to make forgiveness requests because they are interested in if the potential forgiver has or will participate in a moral practice with the aim of release, relief, or repair for the victim or offender.

Throughout chapters 2-4 I answer the second and third questions. I argue in chapter 2 that forgiveness requests are not one thing. There are different kinds of requests *for* forgiveness such as ‘requests in the blame sense’. There are also different kinds of requests *about* forgiveness such as ‘predictive inquiries’. I provide arguments for why certain requests are and are not morally appropriate. But I also claim that only particular individuals have the standing to make requests in their appropriate forms in private. I conclude by explaining when this standing can transfer to the public sphere.

In chapters 3 and 4 I ask about requests’ appropriateness in contexts in which the wrongdoing is political or when the forgiveness has social and political consequences. I am particularly interested in requests made by third parties. I begin by looking at the forgiveness requests of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I claim that the commission could have escaped major philosophical criticisms if they adopted the practice-based account of forgiveness. While there are also things we can learn from the TRC’s use of forgiveness requests, we should not be quick in thinking that those good aspects can easily transfer to the United States.

SUMMARY (continued)

In the final chapter, I address forgiveness requests made in the United States. The context I am interested in is when the victim is black, the wrongdoer is nonblack or a state actor, and the wrongdoing is physical violence. I argue that public requests made in this context shows race-based disrespect and could make forgiveness less likely. I spend a brief portion of the conclusion making proposals of alternative questions that can achieve the same aims of forgiveness requests, but without their moral risks.

CHAPTER 1

Forgiveness Requests and their Motivations

Introduction

On February 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood patrolman, in what many believed was a case of racial profiling. After the acquittal of Zimmerman, a BBC reporter asked Martin's parents if they could ever find it in themselves to forgive George Zimmerman. Sybrina Martin replied, "As Christians we have to forgive. But it's a process, and we are still going through that healing process." On July 19, 2015, Samuel DuBose, a black man, was shot in the head by a white Columbus police officer. A couple of days after his death, his mother, Audrey DuBose, answered questions by the press. One reporter asked: "You're obviously a person of faith. Do you see it in your heart to forgive this person, this officer, whether he's convicted or not?" She replied, "If he asks for forgiveness, oh yeah. I can forgive anybody. God forgave us."

In these cases, reporters are asking secondary victims if they have forgiven or will forgive. The reporters also take whether a person is willing to forgive to be a relevant question to ask at a press conference concerning the murder of young black men at the hands of the police and neighborhood watchmen. Why are the requesters making such an inquiry? In other words, what would motivate a requester to make a forgiveness request?

I will argue that forgiveness requests are requests for and about interrelated moral practices. But what are you really requesting when you do that? A philosophical analysis of forgiveness helps us see that no one thing is essential. If one wants to know why one would request forgiveness, you need an account of the moral practice itself. While there is

a general thought about forgiveness that is captured in two popular accounts of forgiveness, I will argue that these accounts do not capture why someone will request forgiveness. I am not interested in establishing or defending an account of forgiveness that puts all other accounts to shame. Nor am I interested in distinguishing genuine forgiveness from a forgiveness that is not. My aim is to not to argue what theory of forgiveness people making requests have, but which account illuminates the dynamic of making requests for forgiveness.

In section 1 I describe the emotive and relational accounts and explain how they do not show why someone would request forgiveness. In section 2 I describe the practice-based account. I will argue that this account helps us to see what motivates requesters to make forgiveness requests *and* it helps explain why requesters make requests for and about forgiveness and not requests for the results forgiveness might achieve.

1. **Two Popular Forgiveness Accounts**

The two accounts of forgiveness that I consider in this section are the emotive account and the relational account. I will show that although the relational account moves us closer than the emotive account in explaining why someone will make forgiveness requests, both accounts fall short.

1.1 **The Emotive Account**

Does the emotive account of forgiveness explain why one might make forgiveness requests as described in the examples that begin this chapter? I do not think so. Before I explain why, I will explain several versions of the emotive view.¹

The etymology of the term ‘Forgive’ means to *give* or to *give up* something. But what exactly is a person giving or giving up when they forgive? Philosophers who argue for the emotive account claim that we give up resentment. In this camp, philosophers disagree on whether we give up our right to resentment, overcome our resentment, or moderate resentment when we forgive. Others claim that in addition to resentment, we give up a variety of other negative attitudes when we forgive. In what follows, I will briefly discuss these debates. But before I discuss the debates, it is worth making an explanatory point about resentment and other subclasses of anger that are often evoked in the emotive accounts.

Versions of the emotive account of forgiveness give special attention to resentment and make the letting go or moderating of it central to their accounts. If there are different subclasses of anger, such as indignation, rage, resentment, and moral anger, what makes resentment distinct from the others? I do not think that there is a conceptual difference among the subclasses when it comes to injustice and forgiveness except for rage.² Unlike the others, rage can arise for no reason at all and it is uncontrolled. Nevertheless, some philosophers distinguish carefully among these subclasses in order to make clear exactly

¹ I will dedicate lots of space here to this view. This is because it is the most popular view. Also there are several accounts of the emotive view; a version of the relational account entails it; and the practice-based account criticizes it.

² The exception to this is the term ‘black rage’. However, this concept ought not be taken to mean literal rage. Black rage is the anger that comes about due to the constant mistreatment of blacks at the hands of white supremacy and injustice. This rage arises due to reasons. Although, there have been historical urban uprisings, black rage is not necessarily uncontrolled. In this way it differs in all respects to what we mean by rage as defined here.

what is being given up or moderated in forgiveness, while other philosophers do not.

Joseph Butler (1827) claims that there is a difference between *sudden* and *deliberate anger*.

Sudden anger occurs at the smallest slight and oftentimes for no reason at all (113). But deliberate anger comes about because of an injustice and it has an object. Butler thinks we should give up sudden anger in general. In forgiveness, we moderate deliberate anger.

Butler also uses ‘resentment’ and ‘indignation’ interchangeably. For example, consider Butler’s words at the beginning of his sermon IX on *Forgiveness of Injuries*.

It hath been shown, that mankind naturally feel some emotion of mind against injury and injustice, whoever are the sufferers by it, and even though the injurious design be prevented from taking effect. Let *this be called anger, indignation, resentment, or by whatever name anyone shall choose*, the thing itself is understood, and is plainly natural. It has likewise been observed, that this natural indignation is generally moderate and low enough in mankind, in each particular man, when the injury which excites it doth not affect himself, or one whom he considers as himself. Therefore the precepts to forgive, and to love our enemies, do not relate to that general indignation against injury and the authors of it, but to this feeling, or resentment, when raised by private or personal injury. But no man could be thought in earnest who should assert, that though indignation against injury, when others are the sufferers, is innocent and just, yet the same indignation against it, when we ourselves are the sufferers, becomes faulty and blameable. (123, italics added)

Here we see that though Butler makes a distinction between the natural anger that we have in response to wrongdoing done to others versus ourselves, he does not use the terms ‘resentment’ and ‘indignation’ to specifically map on to these different spheres.

Both ‘indignation’ and ‘resentment’ are used to describe the emotion we feel against injury and injustice. My reading of Butler differs from David McNaughton (2017).

McNaughton thinks that resentment and indignation are not only different in kind but also in degree. McNaughton thinks that resentment entails ill-will and indignation does not. When we feel indignation we typically want the wrongdoing to be rectified but this

does not entail holding grudges. However, the resentful wants others to suffer for their own sake. Thus for McNaughton, indignation is a negative attitude. However, negative attitudes are not the same as hostile attitudes like hatred, malice, and resentment.

Whereas negative attitudes are unfavorable attitudes that come from a negative evaluation of the object, hostile attitudes are characterized by ill-will. McNaughton concludes that this is how Butler views indignation and resentment. Therefore it makes sense that many would read Butler's account of forgiveness as overcoming resentment. McNaughton thinks it is not a misreading but a correct reading. To forgive would entail getting rid of the hostile attitude but not the negative attitude.

However, I find McNaughton's textual support for his argument to be unconvincing. Though I do not doubt that there is a difference between hostile and negative attitudes, I do not think that Butler is committed to placing indignation or resentment in those categories. He instead uses the terms interchangeably. For example, further in the Sermon Butler notes, "though injury, injustice and oppression, the baseness of ingratitude, are the natural objects of indignation, or, if you please, of resentment, as before explained." In Sermon 8, *On Resentment*, Butler also uses resentment and indignation interchangeably when he writes, "The indignation raised by cruelty and injustice, and the desire of having it punished, which persons unconcerned would feel, is by no means malice. No; it is resentment against vice and wickedness." These terms are used interchangeably by Butler.

Jean Hampton (1988) makes a distinction between indignation and resentment. Resentment is a form of defiant protest and defense at a wrongdoing that also insults a moral agent's value and rank. Resentment is thus a reaffirmation of one's rank. But resentment not only entails anger but also fear for Hampton. This fear is that perhaps the

wrongdoer is right about our value and worth. Indignation is also a protest and defense against wrongdoing. However, whereas resentment focuses on “one’s own value,” indignation focuses on “someone’s value” and how the wrong challenges a standard of value.³ Therefore, the difference between resentment and indignation for Hampton is that resentment is personal and indignation is impersonal.⁴ When I am harmed, I may feel that my rank has been lowered. In this case, it is resentment that defends the self. When others are harmed, I may recognize that the standard of value has been challenged. In this case, my indignation defends morality. For this reason, Hampton argues that resentment is only experienced by victims. On Hampton’s account, I may be indignant after witnessing a child lie to his mother. This is because I feel that a moral law has been violated. Perhaps I think that people should never lie and that children should show respect to their parents. But only the mother can feel resentment. She will have resentment because she feels that being lied to was an attack on her worth. She may feel that the child no longer respects her enough to tell her the truth. But Hampton also thinks that the mother could be a victim and yet be indignant and not resentful. This will occur because the mother was sufficiently secure in herself not to feel an attack on her self-worth. However, for Hampton, this does not mean that the mother has forgiven the child because she was able to foreswear resentment. For forgiveness to occur for the secure mother, she will still have to overcome her indignation. For Hampton, resentment (or indignation) and moral hatred is what we give up when we forgive. Lastly, Jeffrie Murphy

³ See also Strawson (1962).

⁴ Margaret Walker (2004) criticizes Hampton’s view by arguing that her account of resentment is too limited. For Walker, we often experience resentment when others are wronged. We can witness the bad treatment of a sales clerk to a customer and feel that the customer’s worth has been lowered. Walker also thinks indignation can be felt quite personally just as resentment can also take the cause of others.

(1988) believes that forgiveness is the overcoming of anger, resentment, and hatred (the vindictive passions), so he does think there is a difference between them. However, he does not give an account of the differences between anger and resentment.

Let us now turn to debates concerning the emotive account. For Murphy, forgiveness is giving up the vindictive passions such as anger, resentment, and hatred. It is a matter of how I feel about you and not how I treat you. According to Murphy, mercy is about treatment but forgiveness is about feelings. For that reason, I can forgive you after you are dead but I cannot grant you mercy after you are dead. Murphy is influenced by Butler's account of forgiveness. He reads Butler as claiming that forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment. For Murphy (2003a), wrongdoing promotes the message that we do not matter. Resentment is a response that communicates that one does not accept this message (77). To forgive on Murphy's account is to overcome this resentment. To forgive is to no longer respond to the wrongdoer with resentful feelings. This does not mean that a victim accepts the message that she does not matter. Nor does it mean that she is no longer bothered by the message. For Murphy, the victim overcomes the resentment when the wrongdoer gives her moral reasons. Moral reasons include admitting the wrongdoing and taking back the message that their wrongdoing communicated.

Murphy thinks that we cannot separate our moral reasons for forgiving from our definition of forgiveness because not all cases of overcoming resentment can be considered forgiveness. For example, we could undergo behavioral therapy or hypnosis in order to overcome resentment. Murphy believes this gives us selfish reasons to overcome our resentment but it does not give us moral reasons to forgive. Therapy does not settle the matter in such a way that we no longer need to respond to the wrongdoer with

resentment. As I mentioned above, Murphy claims that we must overcome resentment for moral reasons and these moral reasons include: the offender repented, the offender meant well, the offender has suffered enough, or the offender has undergone the ritual of apology. These grounds are consistent with self-respect, respect for others, and respect for the moral law. On these grounds, the offender has divorced him or herself from the evil act that said “we do not matter.” We can now join with the offender in condemning the wrongdoing. We now have reasons to forgive.

While Murphy’s account focuses on giving up resentment, P. Twambley (1976) thinks that forgiveness is about giving up one’s *right to* resentment. He notes, “by offending you, a man, as it were, incurs a debt (hence we talk of owing recompense, reparation, and apology). You are within your right to resent his action. In forgiving him, *you relinquish that right*, you readjust your relationship to one of equality” (89). Twambley acknowledges that a ‘right to resentment’ appears highly suspect. However, he notes that this account is not foreign to us. We think that if a person forgives another who has not done injury to her, she has no right to forgive. She holds an “unfounded position of power.” I think that inherent in Twambley’s account is the idea that resentment is not simply a natural response to wrongdoing but an apt response. By forgiving, we give up the right to appropriately respond in that way. While I think forgiveness can entail more than what Twambley suggests, the assumption of his account is that one cannot give up a right to resentment if they do not have a right to be resentful to begin with. To forgive on Twambley’s view is to give up one’s right to resentment and in viewing forgiveness in this way, one implicitly acknowledges that a wrong was done to him *and* that he has a right to respond to that wrongdoing with resentment (although through forgiveness they can decide to give up that right).

According to Macalester Bell (2013), forgiveness is not the giving up of resentment but a refusal to be dominated by it. (This view is inspired by Butler, whom I will discuss next.) However, unlike Butler, Bell also argues that forgiveness is not just about resentment. Forgiveness also includes giving up contempt. On Bell's view, if a victim has given up resentment but still has contempt for the wrongdoer, he cannot be said to have forgiven. She admits that philosophers have been right to focus on resentment but she thinks their accounts have not taken contempt seriously as an important moral emotion. Contempt⁵ for Bell is a "dismissive and insulting attitude that manifests disregard for its target" (8). A person who has contempt for another "makes a comparison between herself and the object of her contempt, and sees the condemned as inferior to her along some axis of comparison" (41). On Bell's account, if a victim refuses to be dominated by resentment but still has a hostile attitude toward the offender (contempt), we cannot say that the victim has forgiven. She does not think there is something special about resentment that would make it the only emotion to be overcome in forgiveness. She claims that both contempt and resentment separate us from persons and that is why it is important to overcome them. Therefore, to forgive we should ensure that we are not dominated by resentment *and* should overcome contempt. As a result, she refers to her account of forgiveness as Forgiveness-C (C for Contempt). Bell also thinks that forgiveness should include the letting go of contempt because in doing so a victim is able to maintain her "commitment to morality, self-respect, and respect for the offender" (235). Bell thinks that contempt can be a morally justified response to certain forms of wrongdoing and

⁵ Bell lists four salient properties of contempt. Here I only mention two. The other properties include: taking the whole person and not the action or characteristic as its object and withdrawing from its object.

does not think that it is an immoral emotion but rather a moral emotion. However, she still claims that we should overcome contempt when we forgive.

Although I agree that having contempt for the offender may be a sign that one has not forgiven, I wonder: if it is not enough to stop at resentment, why must we stop at contempt? It seems that we can add more emotions to Bell's account of forgiveness-C. Other emotions, for example, can also fit under Bell's violation of a "commitment to morality, self-respect, and respect for the offender" standard. Let us consider jealousy. I may let go of resentment and contempt but still have feelings of jealousy. I may be jealous that the offender can be forgiven and go on in life, while I still suffer with moral remainders. But being jealous may not show respect for the offender or a commitment to morality. Perhaps by being jealous, I put more focus on myself than others or than what morality demands. I doubt that, on Bell's view, we can still say forgiveness has occurred. This is not to say that Bell's account is mistaken. It does, however, make me doubt that her account is complete.

Hampton (1988) thinks that forgiveness is the giving up of resentment *and* moral hatred. The victim does not give up her judgment of the wrongdoing when she forgives; instead, she revises a judgment of the offender. Hampton thinks that forgiveness occurs when the victim makes a decision to see the offender in a new light. It occurs when the victim decides to "wash away ... the immoral actions or character traits in her ultimate judgment of him ... and comes to see [the offender] as still decent, not rotten as a person" (83). Contrary to Murphy, giving up resentment is not all that forgiveness is for Hampton. Unlike Bell, who thinks that letting go of contempt allows the victim to maintain certain commitments, Hampton thinks letting go of moral hatred is a 'psychological preparation' for forgiveness. It paves the way for a relational transformation. The relational

transformation is seeing the offender in a new light. She thinks seeing the offender in this way will lead to reconciliation.

Pamela Hieronymi (2001) thinks that to be angry is to be committed to four judgments: 1) the act was wrong, 2) the wrongdoer, as a member of the moral community, has not done what is morally expected, 3) you ought not be wronged, and 4) the past wrongdoing still makes a threatening claim on you. For Hieronymi, the first three claims imply the fourth judgment. She refers to her account of forgiveness as “uncompromising” because she thinks that to forgive is to abandon resentment that doesn’t compromise commitments to judgments 1-3. To forgive, then, is to overcome anger (which is a protest on her view) but this overcoming occurs only when there is no longer a reason to be committed to judgment 4. In forgiveness, we revise the 4th judgment and this gives us reason to overcome anger. In doing so, we do not compromise our commitment to judgments 1-3.

What is the reason to let go of the fourth judgment? Hieronymi rejects the view that compassion or empathy is the answer. On the one hand, she thinks compassion and empathy can fuel our anger. It is because I understand your side of the story and because I wish you well that I am angry about your misdeeds. On the other hand, she thinks that taking up these attitudes can cause us to compromise judgments 1-3. My pity for you can come about because of my change in view; a change in view that is a revision of judgments 1-3 and thus a compromise.

Hieronymi recommends apologies instead of compassion and empathy. An apology can lead us to think that the event no longer makes a threatening claim on us. Apologies are reasons to revise the judgment. When someone apologizes, they assure us that they regret the wrongdoing and vow not to do it again. Because of the apology, we

may no longer have reason to protest judgment 4 because the apology leads us to think that there is no longer a threat. On her view, forgiveness is uncompromising because through forgiveness we do not give up judgments 1-3. Forgiveness is not only uncompromising but it *articulates* judgments 1-3. It also articulates that judgment 4 has been undermined—providing reason to overcome resentment.

What emerges from consideration of these views is that the reason why one would make a forgiveness request is because the requester is interested in what victims have done or will do to their resentment and other negative and positive attitudes. Do these accounts help us to see why someone might make a forgiveness requests? Murphy and Twambley's accounts—with their focus on moderating or giving up a right to resentment—focus on how a victim *feels* about the offender. However, it does not show why a victim's feelings might matter to the requester. It does not explain what change in the victims feelings might do in the world that would motivate a forgiveness request. But even if we imagine that feelings alone do matter, a concern for victim's feelings may explain why the offender or the victim's intimates might request forgiveness but it doesn't explain why others might. For example, the offender—in being concerned with how others feel about him—may want the victim to change her feelings about him. An intimate of the victim, in being concerned about the victim's feelings, may want the victim to change her feelings. They want her happy not angry. But this doesn't explain why a reporter (someone outside of her immediate circle of concern) would make a request. The victim's feelings just might not matter to the reporter the way they do to the offender or the victim's intimate. Similarly, Bell's concern with contempt and Hampton's concern for moral hatred tell us more about why an offender would make a forgiveness request but they do not explain why a third party would. An offender may not want to be

an object of contempt or hatred. However, a third party might not be concerned with how a victim views an offender. Hieronymi's account tells us why an offender would make a forgiveness requests. An offender may want to know if the victim feels that his past actions are making threatening claims on her now. He wants verification that she now feels and believes she is safe. But this is too narrow. How might we explain why one would make a forgiveness requests to a victim whose offender is deceased or is no longer a threat because they have been punished? What more could they be asking about beyond an inquiry into threatening claims? As a result, these versions of the emotive account do not explain why different parties would make forgiveness requests. I will now turn to another version of the emotive account and argue that it brings us closer to explaining why a requester would make a forgiveness request.

The emotive account of forgiveness—with its focus on resentment—has been popular among contemporary philosophers. However, this view was first proposed by Butler over 300 years ago. Many philosophers such as Murphy and Bell are influenced by the account of forgiveness offered by Butler. I think Murphy in his earlier work misreads Butler's account of forgiveness as overcoming resentment. On the other hand, I think Bell reads Butler correctly as viewing forgiveness not as the overcoming of resentment but the refusal to be dominated by resentment. However, more needs to be said about Butler's full account.

Butler (1827) believes that one could have resentment and yet still forgive. Butler thinks that forgiveness is not overcoming resentment but letting go of the abuses of resentment. He writes, "To forgive injuries; that is to keep clear of those abuses before mentioned; because that we have the habitual temper of benevolence, is taken for granted" (§ IX). By the abuses of resentment, Butler means having a disproportionate

degree of resentment, being partial, and seeking revenge. By contrast, the act of moderating resentment entails having a proportionate degree of resentment, using resentment not for revenge but for justice, and not acting in malice but having the right balance of compassion and displeasure toward the offender (Ibid).

Butler does not want to get rid of resentment altogether because he thinks that resentment motivates us to pursue justice. He writes:

And after an injury is done and there is a necessity that the offender should be brought to justice; the cool consideration of reason, that the security and peace of society requires examples of justice should be made, might indeed be sufficient to procure laws to be enacted, and sentence passed: but is it that cool reflection in the injured person, which, for the most part, brings the offender to justice? Or is it not resentment and indignation against the injury and the author of it? I am afraid there is no doubt which is commonly the case (Ibid, VIII:5).

Indifference and calm emotion may have a role within the courts of justice, but justice does not always come about through such “cool” actions and in fact such dispositions, like meekness, can cause us to revise our moral judgments. Instead, justice is first pursued by those who are hot; who are overcome with the recognition of the injustice and the strong, intense desire to work to reach the goal of justice. Moral anger provides this heat.

Resentment does not only demand that we punish wrongdoers but it also helps regulate our own conduct so that we will not inflict injury and cruelty on others (Ibid, VIII).

Butler continues:

The natural object or occasion of settled resentment, then, being injury, as distinct from pain or loss, it is easy to see, that to prevent and to remedy such injury, and the miseries arising from it, is the end for which this passion was implanted in man. It is to be considered as a weapon put into our hands by nature, against injury, injustice and cruelty (Ibid).

Resentment for Butler has this role naturally. If forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment altogether, we will miss out on the benefits of what nature has given to us. For this reason, Butler argues for a moderation of resentment. This moderation is not

contrary to love or benevolence. He claims that we can love even our enemy and yet have resentment against him for the wrongdoing. Butler also claims that this resentment is not limited to our enemies. He recognizes that we also have resentment toward those we love. He writes, “Resentment is not inconsistent with goodwill. For we often see both together in very high degrees; not only in parents towards their children, but in cases of friendship and dependence, where there is no natural relation. These contrary passions, though they may lessen, do not necessarily destroy one another”(Ibid, IX). This example shows that resentment does not destroy benevolence. They can co-exist.

In forgiveness, for Butler, the victim does not give up moderated resentment but instead extends compassion, pity, and goodwill toward the offender. What the victim gives up in Butler’s case is the right to revenge and not resentment. Unlike the other accounts, this does explain why a range of requesters would make forgiveness requests. Out of a concern for achieving justice and eliminating hostile environments that revenge creates for all, the requester makes forgiveness requests. While I think Butler’s account is more persuasive than the other emotive accounts in answering what motivates forgiveness requests, his account leads me to more questions than answers. If requesting forgiveness in a political context is about requesting that victims do certain things with their emotions, when will the requester or victim know when forgiveness has taken place on this view? Does it take place at the moment they give up the emotion or when they decide to give it up? I think that in either time frame, the action or decision will only be a part of the process of forgiveness but not forgiveness. It seems that forgiveness is more than just the absence of or decision about feeling. There seems to be more moral content that has not been accounted for in the emotive account. I am also inclined to think that it can’t be only the emotional states that requesters and victims are interested in here. There are

other characteristics and aims that have not been articulated that both the requesters and victims are after and which the emotive view fails to account for. For example, the emotive view assumes that we *always* have the same response to wrongdoing. It assumes that when we are wronged, we will always feel the hard feelings or reactive attitudes of hatred, contempt, and anger. However, we do not always feel these emotions in response to wrongdoing. We may experience sadness or disappointment. But it sounds weird to say that giving up or moderating sadness or disappointment is forgiveness. This is different from no longer seeing the perpetrator in a certain way. In this way, I no longer see the moral agent as the person who has disappointed me. But the way I see the wrongdoer and the particular emotions I moderate or give up are two different things. To no longer be sad is more akin to no longer grieving than to no longer refusing to forgive. So I think that when making a forgiveness request, the emotive account does not illuminate the dynamic of making requests because *not all* victims are angry or full of contempt. In the examples I introduce at the beginning of this chapter, all of the victims publicly expressed grief not anger. It is unhelpful in understanding why requests are happening to think of these as cases where someone is asking because they want someone else to change their emotional state to achieve the aims that Butler suggests.

1.2. **The Relational View**

Unlike the emotive accounts, relational accounts of forgiveness do not focus primarily on emotions but also on relationships. This account brings us closer than Butler's emotive account in understanding what motivates forgiveness requests.

According to relational accounts of forgiveness, forgiveness is an interpersonal relation or a relation of moral repair. I refer to Charles Griswold (2007) and Margaret

Walker's (1998; 2004; 2006) accounts of forgiveness as examples of the relational account. I refer to these accounts as 'relational' for their emphasis on practices that involve how we relate to the other and for their focus on repair and reconciliation. However, while Griswold's account gives importance to resentment, Walker has a more expansive vision in which resentment plays a part.

For Griswold, forgiveness is a moral relation between two individuals. When a person forgives, they let go of resentment for moral reasons, do not forget the wrong, do not seek revenge, and in some cases (re) accept the offender as a friend (40). But forgiveness also comes with certain conditions or norms. On Griswold's view, the victim needs reasons to forgive and the offender provides reasons by meeting several conditions (50). The offender must first acknowledge she was the responsible agent, repudiate her deeds, and experience and express regret. The offender then commits to becoming a person who doesn't cause injury to others and shows that they understand the damage they have caused. The conditions the forgiver must meet include five steps: forswear revenge, moderate resentment, commit to letting go of resentment altogether, change their belief about the wrongdoer, and address the offender and declare forgiveness. This process shows that "the offender depends on the victim in order to be forgiven, and the victim depends on the offender in order to forgive. This interdependence is part of the logic of forgiveness" (49). Griswold's account of forgiveness makes forgiveness something that both the offender and the victim participate in. On Griswold's view, forgiveness cannot be said to take place without the offender also undergoing the process. Here Griswold provides necessary and sufficient conditions to forgiveness.

According to Walker's (2006) relational view, forgiveness is a morally reparative process. She thinks that the emotive view assumes that all instances of wrongdoing will

involve resentment or that resentment is what prevents us from forgiving. However, Walker thinks that the reaction to many acts of wrongdoing can involve other attitudes like disappointment, sadness, and fear instead of vindictive passions. But if we stretch forgiveness to include these attitudes, she doubts that we would be able to recognize cases of forgiveness. Contrary to Griswold, Walker claims that an individual can “release himself and his wrongdoer from the sequels to a wrong” and can do so “in a determined and practical way without ceasing to experience many difficult feelings” (135). This practical way is a promise to go forward in civility and cooperation. She refers to this as ‘reconciliation’. She notes that reconciliation occurs in cases in which the victim and offender go on in goodwill in the relationship. It also occurs when both the victim and offender no longer continue in a relationship that would “only morally deform one or both of them” if they continue (162). Walker gets us to see that in both cases of reconciliation, a relationship of a *moral kind* is restored. We are intertwined in moral relationships with each other. Moral relationships for Walker consist of “trust-based relations anchored on our expectations of one another that require us to take responsibility for what we do or fail to do, and that allow us to call others to account for what they do or fail to do” (1998, 23). Wrongdoing harms these relationships. Forgiveness is a morally reparative process. It repairs our moral relationships.

The damage forgiveness tries to work through or get beyond is being treated wrongly, which, in addition to whatever other harms may have occurred, is a *failure in moral relationship*. This suggests that forgiveness should restore, or return to a functioning state, the conditions of moral relationship ... Forgiveness as a morally reparative process, then, must affirm values and standards (the boundaries) as shared among those with whom we deal, must stabilize trust in ourselves and others to be responsive to those standards, and must restore or instill a hopeful view of our moral values, ourselves, and each other (2006, 162, my emphasis).

Trust and hope are compromised in wrongdoing. Wrongdoing can crush our hopes in others. Wrongdoing also disappoints our expectation that people will be reliable and responsible. Repairing our moral relationships is an attempt to restore hope and trust. For Walker, victims and offenders can engage in the project of moral repair through forgiveness while also continuing to have a just anger or continuing sorrow as a result of the wrongdoing. Unlike Griswold's 'two-way' forgiveness conditions, Walker does not require in all cases participation from the offending party in order for moral repair to occur. In cases in which the wrongdoer has died or is unrepentant, forgiveness will not lead to reconciliation but it can still aim for moral repair. For Walker, moral repair is "the process of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained" (6). It "restor[es] or creat[es] trust and hope in a shared sense of value and responsibility" (28) or "involves creating or stabilizing normative expectations, trust, and hope of some types for those parties affected by wrongdoing. The parties include primarily wrongdoers, victims and communities"(38). A victim may forgive a deceased wrongdoer with the aim of regaining hope and trust that we will all live up to and be responsive to shared standards.

Do these accounts help us to see why someone might make a forgiveness requests? Griswold's account, with its focus on participation of the offender and victim in forgiveness, does not account for why someone would make a forgiveness requests when the offender is absent. In the examples above, the offenders are not present nor do they take responsibility for the wrongdoing. Griswold's account does not explain what would motivate a forgiveness requests in cases where an offender is unrepentant. Walker's account improves on this limitation. Moral repair, through forgiveness, can occur without the offender. But while the offender need not be present, the aim of repair seems limited.

On Walker's account, a requester makes a forgiveness request with the aim of promoting civility and cooperation. These are worthy and necessary goals in a political society.

These goals are also similar to Butler's account. However, I do not think this is the only reason why requesters make requests. There are other aims that the requester is after that are not captured under repair. While the relational account gets us closer to seeing why one would make forgiveness requests, it too falls short.

Both the emotive and the relational accounts look at a practice: the practice of forgiveness. The emotive view looks at that practice and says that what is important about it is how it changes our emotional state. The relational view says it is how it changes our relations to one another. In the next section, I argue that the practice-based account says that it is the moral practice(s) (along with their aims) within the overall practice of forgiveness itself that is essential. This, I will argue, gives us a more complete account of what motivates forgiveness requests.

2. **The Practice-Based Account**

2.1. **A Description**

Alice MacLachlan (2009) thinks that focus on the emotive account is mistaken for two reasons. First, it idealizes resentment as what is necessary to do all the moral work. For example, she believes that philosophers often link moral protest to resentment. However, moral protest can also be linked to fear or need. I can protest a loss in health care not because I am angry, but because I am afraid of what will happen to me if I get sick. I can also morally protest a colleague's lack of effort in a collaborative project not out of resentment but from a need I have that he deliver for the survival of both our careers. While Murphy links resentment to self-respect, MacLachlan notes that one need not have

a healthy self-respect to protest. Those who lack self-respect or who are deficient in self-respect can still resent moral wrongs.

Second, the emotive account risks “excluding or undermining the ritualistic and behavioral aspects of forgiveness.” Instead of looking at forgiveness as a moral ideal or single act (the overcoming or moderation of emotions), MacLachlan argues that we should view forgiveness as ‘forgivingness.’ This concept is used to indicate that there is no paradigm of forgiveness that is best or perfect nor is there a single act of forgiveness. In forgiveness, there are a variety of practices and these practices vary in moral value. For this reason, I refer to her account as the practice-based account.⁶ On her view, then, forgiveness is “a set of interrelated ... broad and overlapping moral practices for negotiating wrongdoing that may express a *number* of reparative aims: relief, release or reconciliation” (191). By *relief*, we mean the release of offenders from the consequences of their wrongdoing as well as relief for victims. By *release*, we mean release of victims from the holds the wrongdoing may place on them and release of wrongdoers from the ‘subjective remainders of wrongdoing.’ By *repair*, we mean the restoration of trust and hope. This repair may include the repair of relationships, victims’ wellbeing, or wrongdoers’ moral status. The practice-based account is a functional account. It identifies acts of forgiveness in part by the moral work they do. Although the practices are broad they share in these functions.

The interrelated moral practices can share in and manifest along a number of dimensions: affective, cognitive, performative, and relational. Possible examples of forgiveness along these dimensions include:

⁶ MacLachlan refers to it as the multi-dimensional view.

1. Moderating resentment (affective)
2. Refraining from retaliating behavior (behavioral)
3. Re-establishing a new positive relationship (relational)
4. Articulating utterances of forgiveness (performative)
5. Coming to see the wrongdoer as more than their harmful acts (cognitive)

The practice-based account is a pluralistic, particularistic approach to forgiveness. No single dimension is necessary or sufficient for forgiveness. The upshot is three fold. First, it shows that a wide range of actions, attitudes, or gestures may be plausibly understood to constitute forgiveness in a particular context. While MacLachlan's view is quite similar to Butler's in that Butler takes into consideration compassion, goodwill, and community as indirect aims of forgiveness, he is dedicated to the idea that it requires a moderation of anger. While MacLachlan does not deny that emotions can be present, she doesn't think that emotions alone are necessary for forgiveness. For example, another reason why she finds the focus on resentment problematic is "it risks excluding or undermining the ritualistic, behavioral and even pragmatic elements of forgiveness; to the person being forgiven, how she is treated by the forgiver may be all more important than Murphy allows. Being 'let back in' may be as much a matter of social gesture as it is a matter of deep emotional transformation" (11). This does not guarantee that the acts above guarantee forgiveness. Rather, it explains why people who engage in the acts might take themselves to be forgiving and the recipients of such acts might take themselves to be forgiven. This also explains why someone would make a forgiveness requests when resentment is not present. This is because the view accounts for other emotions, attitudes,

and gestures.

Second, it helps us make sense of puzzling cases of forgiveness like forgiving the dead. If forgiveness is only relational, it is hard to imagine victims forgiving the dead if the wrongdoer is required to participate in forgiveness. This explains why someone would make forgiveness requests when an offender is not present.

Third, unlike the other accounts, it gives a complete explanation as to what a requester is after when making a forgiveness request. The requester is not only interested in what victims do when they forgive but also in the functions the practices aim at. Requesters are interested in forgiveness's function or purpose being achieved, and that it be achieved in the particular way that forgiveness does it. The requester is not interested in the victim letting go of anger as merely an exercise or social practice but a moral practice. The requester is also interested in how might the moral practice provide release or relief for the victim or wrongdoer. The requester is not only interested in the victim seeing the offender in a new light but also in the moral repair that occurs as a result. It may seem that the practice-based view has the same advantages of Walker's relational view. However, I think that what makes the practice-based view distinct from Walker's is that it is more expansive. MacLachlan makes room for the fact that forgiveness can have several aims. While Walker focuses on moral repair, MacLachlan shows us that that is not the only aim of forgiveness. While Walker focuses on the victim, MacLachlan recognizes that forgiveness not only serves the victim but can also aim at relieving the wrongdoer. This provides us with expansive reasons for why a requester would make forgiveness requests. However, we ought not think that requesters are only interested in the functions of the practice. If they were, they would not make forgiveness requests but "function requests." For this reason, I will now briefly explain what it means for forgiveness to be a

moral practice. In doing so I hope to show why forgiveness is usually requested and not forgiveness' functions.

MacLachlan (2015a) defines practices as “examples of organized activity; they are social, cooperative, and as complex, organized activity among multiple agents, they develop over time” (3). Practices have *authoritative norms*. “These include both rules that must be obeyed for one’s actions to qualify as engaging in that practice in the first place and also criteria for judging excellent performance, within the limits of obedience to those formal rules” (3). For example, for a game of chess to be chess, there must be two opponents, a chess board (imaginary or physical), and players following the rules of chess. Checkers is not chess for this reason. Forgiveness as a practice also has authoritative norms but unlike the rules of chess, social practices have no explicit rules. There is no consensus in philosophy on forgiveness’s authoritative norms, what the moral practice entails. This is evident not only in the different accounts of forgiveness but in everyday language used to describe instances of forgiveness such as “whipping the slate clean” and “change of heart.” But the authoritative norms range from least controversial to most controversial. Authoritative norms of forgiveness concern the target, recipient, and agent of forgiveness. We forgive for something. The target of forgiveness is wrongdoing. In doing so, I pick it out as wrong. This can only happen if I remember the wrong and think it wrong in the first place. In forgiving the recipient, I also hold him responsible for the wrongdoing. This is different from excusing. The least controversial authoritative norms governing practices of forgiveness include: the target of forgiveness is wrongdoing and the recipients of forgiveness are wrongdoers who are also being held responsible for wrongdoing. A more controversial authoritative norm governing practices of forgiveness

is that only victims can forgive. There is also debate over whether third parties have the standing to forgive.

Practices also include the achievement of goods that are internal to the practice. An internal good of chess may be to master the rules. What makes a practice a 'moral' practice is that the practice's "internal goods coincide with moral goods. Its ultimate aims and rewards match those of morality" (MacLachlan 2015, 7). The internal goods of chess need not match morality. Chess is not a moral practice. However, because forgiveness is a moral practice, it includes achieving moral goods that are internal to the practice. The mutual trust in re-establishing a new relationship and achieving relief for both victim and offender are examples of goods internal to the practice of forgiveness.

2.2. ***What Motivates the Request?***

The practice-based account of forgiveness helps us see why a speaker would make a forgiveness request and not merely a function request for two reasons. First, in making the request, the requester is also making moral claims. Because forgiveness as a moral practice has authoritative norms that concern the target, recipient, and agent of forgiveness, the requester—through the request—acknowledges these concerns. On this view, a requester could be motivated to make forgiveness requests out of a respect for morality.⁷ By making forgiveness requests, the requester is acknowledging wrongdoing and also holding an agent responsible and may do so out of respect for morality. Through the request "Do you think you will forgive Ava?", the requester acknowledges that a

⁷ This need not be the motivation in every instance of forgiveness requests. A requester could request forgiveness out of lip service, without any commitment to morality. Specific moral intention need not match every instance of our use of language. Here I raise a possibility.

wrongdoing has occurred and that Ava is responsible for wrongdoing. One need not respect morality by only requesting the functions of forgiveness (e.g., Do you think you will be friends with Ava again?). A requester could think that Ava is not responsible. A requester could think that a wrongdoing had not occurred. A requester might think that the victim is unjustified in being angry toward Ava. And yet, the requester could still ask the victim if she will be friends with Ava without any commitments about the target, recipient, or agent of forgiveness.

Second, through the request, the requester communicates an interest in moral practices, not practical ones, as a means to the functions. Recall that on the practice-based account forgiveness is a set of interrelated moral practices. The affective, cognitive, relational, behavioral dimensions of forgiveness are moral. These dimensions have functions. To get to the functions, we need the moral practice. By asking “Do you think you will forgive Ava?” (forgiveness request), the requester is asking if the victim will participate in a moral practice. This does not require that the requester be committed to such a practice. On the other hand, by asking “Do you think you will be friends with Ava again?” (function request), the requester does not necessarily communicate an interest or investment in moral practices. The requester could be committed to the victim denying or excusing wrongdoing. And these could be practical routes to achieve friendship for the requester. However, the practice-based account allows us to see that if forgiveness is a moral practice, the requester—in requesting forgiveness—takes the moral practice to be as important as the function. At worst, they see the moral practice as a means to the function but important nonetheless. A requester makes forgiveness requests instead of merely function requests, not because they are only concerned with results, but because

they are motivated out of respect for morality to make certain moral claims and articulate the relevancy of moral practices.

In conclusion, I think a strength of the practice-based account is that it provides us with a clearer picture of why a requester would make requests for and about forgiveness. When making forgiveness requests, the requester need not be committed to one particular moral practice or to any moral and political aim that may result from these practices. The requester is motivated to make requests because of these moral practices and aims.

Conclusion

In summary, there are a variety of accounts of forgiveness. Some philosophers claim that forgiveness is the giving up of resentment while others argue that forgiveness is the giving up of negative attitudes, more generally, toward the offender. Some philosophers claim that forgiveness is a moral relation or the moral repair of relationships. However, I have argued that these accounts do not provide a full account of what motivates forgiveness requests in the cases that begin this chapter. I think the practice-based account is the most reasonable account to help illuminate the dynamic of making and motivating requests. It is, therefore, the account of forgiveness that I will refer to throughout this dissertation.

In chapter 2, I will discuss forgiveness requests in more detail. I will also consider who has the standing to make these requests and under what appropriate forms they can make them. On the emotive account, one might think that a person who is concerned about the emotional state of the victim (e.g., family, friends, or a therapist) as well as the wrongdoer to whom the emotion is directed toward, will have the standing to request forgiveness. On Griswold's version of the relational view, one might think that only the wrongdoer has the standing to request forgiveness given that both the wrongdoer and the

victim are required to participate together in forgiveness. On Walker's version of the relational view, given that both the wrongdoer and the community are incorporated in the project of moral repair, one might assume that they will both have the standing to request forgiveness. On the practice-based view, one might think that anyone who desires that certain aims be achieved or who is willing to aid the victim in any particular practice, has the standing to request forgiveness. I will show in chapter 2 that these assumptions are incorrect.

CHAPTER 2

The Standing to Request Forgiveness and its Appropriate Forms

Introduction

We often hear expressions of sorrow, regret, and pleas for forgiveness in our private lives and also in the public realm. We express them privately to our loved ones, colleagues, and even to strangers. Politicians and celebrities publicly express them at news conferences, in press releases, or on social media. These expressions often take the following forms⁸:

- Example 1* “I want to say to the victims that I am truly sorry. I regret all the pain that I have caused them. I hope they can see just how sincere I really am.”
- Example 2* “I know what I did was wrong. Can you please forgive me?”
- Example 3* “If she was to apologize for what she did, could you find it in your heart to forgive her?”
- Example 4* “We have tried to make up for all the harm we have caused you and your tribe. Ten years have gone by now. Do you think you will ever forgive us?”

⁸ I am *not* committed to a literal interpretation of these expressions or their literal forms. I understand that often when we say words we do not always mean them literally. I think apologies and forgiveness requests may overlap in their usages. However, I am more concerned with what we take people to mean when they utter these expressions than their literal interpretations. I am sensitive to the fact that what may sound like an apology, can actually be a more polite way to request forgiveness. While I will be making use of specific forms of expressions in this chapter, I am not committed to their meaning the same thing in all contexts. I am also aware that people in other cultures may utter the same words and mean something different.

Example 1 is an expression of sorrow and regret. The speaker is not asking for anything from the victim but only wants the victim to understand that the speaker is sorry for his part in the wrong. Example 2 is a request from the wrongdoer that the victim forgives him. This is a request *for* forgiveness. Along with the request is also an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Example 3 is an inquiry *about* the victim's forgiveness based on the possibility of a hypothetical condition being met. The speaker wonders: if an apology is ever offered does the victim think she will forgive the woman as a result of the apology? The requester is not asking for the victim's forgiveness. Instead, the speaker is inquiring or making a request *about* the victim's forgiveness. The speaker wonders if the victim will ever forgive. Example 4 is different from example 3. While example 3 focuses on a hypothetical condition, example 4 presents two satisfied conditions: reparations and time. The speaker then wonders whether, given these actual conditions, the victim *thinks* she will forgive in the *future*.

It is not surprising that these expressions often roll off our tongues—for we live in a world inhabited by moral agents who often make mistakes and intentionally participate in misconduct and vicious behavior. We also live in a world with some agents who have a desire or a need to rectify harm (even if it is for mere appearance). These expressions are assumed to be *what one should say*—for silence can be interpreted as disinterest, narcissism, complicity, a condoning of wrongdoing, or contentment with disharmony.

But do these expressions mean the same thing? Who has the standing to make them? Is it morally appropriate to utter them, no matter their distinct form? In response to these questions, I will argue in this chapter that (1) we should take apologies and forgiveness requests to be two distinct practices; (2) in focusing on requests, I conclude that only certain agents have the standing to make forgiveness requests, and (3) it is morally

permissible for those who have the standing to make forgiveness requests only in their appropriate form.

There is not much philosophical literature on these questions and so I see myself making a valuable contribution in this domain. Since philosophers often equate apologies and requests for forgiveness with each other (Hallich 2016; Szablowinski 2012; Waldschlagel 2011), I begin by making important distinctions between them. I motivate three reasons why we must take them to be distinct practices. I will then answer the questions of who has the standing to make forgiveness requests and what are its appropriate forms.

1. **Apologies and Requests**

The expressions above are examples of apologies, requests for forgiveness, and requests about forgiveness. I take them all to be distinct practices. Although they may overlap, it is important that we do not conflate these practices. For example, uttering the sentence, “I hope you can see just how sincere I really am” is a different practice than stating “I know what I did was wrong. Can you please forgive me?” The former is an expression of regret and sorrow and a wish that the victim responds to her statement as such. It may even be read as an apology. The latter is an acknowledgment of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness. The speaker aims to show the victim that he understands that he participated in wrongdoing. But it is more than just an acknowledgement or confession. It is a request for the victim’s forgiveness. Although there is more philosophical literature on apologies than on forgiveness requests, requests are mentioned in the literature. However, when philosophers mention forgiveness requests, unfortunately, they often conflate them with apologies. Little work has been done on the distinction between the

two.⁹ People who theorize often treat them as more linked than they really are. However, we should be careful not to conflate them.

There are three reasons why we might *not* want to conflate apologies with forgiveness requests. When we conflate them several things occur: (1) we ignore important features of each practice; (2) we do not solve the paradox that states that you cannot be a truly repentant person and apologize if you are *also* a person who morally protests the wrongdoing; and (3) we conflate the issue of who has the standing to apologize with the issue of who has the standing to request forgiveness.

I take apologizing and requesting forgiveness to be two different practices.¹⁰ We can apologize without requesting forgiveness. We can also request forgiveness without apologizing. If we run these two practices together we run the risk of ignoring important features of each. This is because apologies and requests differ in meaning. Apologies are victim-oriented and requests for forgiveness are perpetrator-oriented.¹¹ Explaining apologies' diverse meanings, Nick Smith writes:

Apologies can recognize that we have been harmed, helping us to understand what happened and why. The person apologizing accepts blame for our injury and she explains why her actions were wrong. This validates the victim's beliefs, and she can begin or resume a relationship based on these shared values. The offender also treats us differently at the most fundamental level when she apologizes to us: instead of viewing us as an obstacle to her self-interests, we become a person with dignity. If the apologizer regrets her actions and promises not to repeat them, we can take some security in the hope that she will not harm us again. This provides a reason to

⁹ There are exceptions. See Celermajer (2006), Trudy Govier (1999), and Bovens (2009).

¹⁰ Recognizing that they are distinct practices does not deny that the two practices are more tightly linked "conversationally" if not "logically". In our communication with people, we rely on Gricean "conversational implicatures". Even if certain words do not, as a matter of logical deductive implication, entail others, they can have a certain meaning based on the context we are intending them. But even here, we ought not suppose that a person apologizing will always intend it (in all contexts) as requests for or about forgiveness. Hence, the example in the following sentence above.

¹¹ Thanks to Rachel McKinney (in conversation) for getting me to see this distinction more clearly. Particularly, this distinction is present when offenders are the speaker.

trust the offender and may be terribly important if she is someone for whom the victim cares deeply (2008, 9-10).

Glenn Pettigrove adds, “[an apology] will ... condemn wrongdoing, affirm the victim’s moral standing” (2012, 199). Apologies are victim-oriented in that they provide the victim with recognition, acknowledgement, validation, and reassurance. Apologies recognize wrongdoing and acknowledge who was wronged and who committed the wrongdoing. They condemn the wrongdoing. They validate that the victim is right in believing they were mistreated. They provide reassurance that the wrongdoer will not inflict the wrong again.

I do not intend to paint a perfect picture of apologies. Even though apologies recognize wrongdoing and can be offered without intentions of grandstanding, apologies are “vice nested in virtue.” (Spelman 2002, 96). They can therefore cut off any further criticisms of the wrongdoer. What an apology communicates is also impacted by social space. Apologies can be used to renounce as well as reinforce power. A rushed, anxious apology may communicate a renouncement of power while a slow and loud apology can be used to reinforce power. Apologies can press you for a response (the ‘subpoena’ power of apology). They can also be used to assert a particular narrative instead of accurately characterizing what happened and to whom it happened (MacLachlan 2013, 136-137). Social positions such as gender and race impact apologies as a practice. For example, women—because of gendered virtues such as love and forgiveness—face pressure to accept apologies, particularly by men. Social positions also impact what harms get apologized for (129-135). While a police officer may apologize that their actions led to a black person’s death, the responsibility taken is often narrow and apologies for systematic practices within the criminal justice system are rarely made by those in power. This does not take away

from the meanings of apologies that I highlight above. However, we should not adopt an ideal theory of apologies. They do not occur in ideal circumstances or carry the same meaning across all contexts.

Requests for forgiveness have different meanings than apologies. They are perpetrator-oriented. The meaning of requests for forgiveness is for the perpetrator to express his or her need for forgiveness. Through the requests, the wrongdoer hopes to reassert what was uttered through their apology. Requests not only ask that the victim forgives but they ask that the victim see the offender differently and that the victim absorb the damage the offender has done.¹²

To ask you to understand things from my point of view is to hope for an excuse, not to ask for forgiveness. Nor, when I ask for forgiveness, am I asking for your pity or compassion in response to the pain of my remorse. Nor am I asking you simply to acknowledge the fact of my repentance and reform. I am instead asking you to believe me when I say that I no longer see what I did to you as acceptable, to recognize and so ratify my change of heart. I am also, importantly, asking you to willingly absorb the damage that I have done and which I cannot repair, both the damage in our relationship and the broader material or financial damage, which is an offense to you and which testifies against my change of heart. I don't want your pity. Not even your compassion will suffice. I need something at once more intimate and more costly-I need your forgiveness (Hieronymi 2001, 554).

To ask for forgiveness is to acknowledge that the wrongdoing “was such as might properly be resented” but it is also to want the victim to not let the offense magnify the role in how she views and feels toward the wrongdoer.¹³ Thus, the possible meanings of forgiveness requests include: soliciting a belief in the wrongdoer’s denunciation of wrongdoing and

¹² This latter point helps us to make sense of requests for forgiveness when they are uttered by a third party. Unlike the wrongdoer, the third party will not be expressing their need for forgiveness because she does not need it. However, she will be asking that victims do the aforementioned things. The third party’s request is very much speaker-oriented in this way.

¹³ See Allais (2008).

their change of heart; articulating a recognition that the wrongdoer stands in need of the victim's forgiveness;¹⁴ recognizing that damage does not disappear in forgiveness but remains something the victim may have to absorb.

Nava Löwenheim, on the contrary, takes apologies to be different avenues for requesting forgiveness (2009, 535-539). On her account, apologies do not *differ in meaning* from requests for forgiveness; they are just *less meaningful* requests for forgiveness. By less meaningful, she means that they are less sincere. She claims that saying "I'm sorry you feel that way but" is a less meaningful way of requesting forgiveness than "I'm sorry that." And both these expressions are less meaningful than the ideal explicit request for forgiveness which will include "Will you forgive me?" and several of the following five elements: 1) acknowledgement of wrongdoing; 2) acceptance of responsibility; 3) expression of regret or remorse; and 4) readiness to give compensation or reparations. I agree that we can express feelings of regret and a need to be forgiven in less meaningful ways. "I'm sorry that I harmed you" sounds more sincere and meaningful than "I'm sorry you feel that way." I also think there are implicit meanings to our expressions of regret. We could be implicitly asking for forgiveness when we explicitly apologize.

However, I do not think that the speaker is always requesting forgiveness when they utter an apology. I may apologize for the harm I have caused you. I may regret my actions

¹⁴ Although this may seem obvious, I take Smith's 'articulation point' to be responding to several possibilities. A perpetrator might think that he has not done anything wrong, so he does not need forgiveness. A perpetrator might think that he has done wrong, but the wrong is not serious enough to warrant forgiveness. Or, the perpetrator might realize that he has done wrong but does not want to be forgiven because either he is not interested in what the forgiveness might achieve for either party or he might think that his wrongdoing is unforgivable. All this can affect articulating a need for forgiveness. Therefore, the articulation of the requests can communicate that "yes, I have wronged you, I am not downplaying the wrongdoing, I do not think it is a wrongdoing that is unforgivable, and I stand in need of the forgiveness for what it can achieve."

and want to communicate that I recognize what I did was wrong. However, this does not always mean I am requesting forgiveness for I may think my act is unforgivable. My apology then is not a less meaningful request for forgiveness. It is not a request at all. The apology is spoken to ‘condemn wrongdoing and affirm the victim’s moral standing.’ It is not a bad attempt at ‘asking you to willingly absorb the damage.’ Recognizing the different meanings that apologies and requests for forgiveness have can help us understand what a speaker is communicating to the victim and asking the victim to do when they utter them. However, by blending them we ignore their distinct, important features.

Making a distinction between apologies and forgiveness requests can also help us resolve the paradox of apologies. Oliver Hallich (2016) describes ‘the paradox of apologies’¹⁵ as follows: Responses to wrongdoing (i.e. having resentment) are apt. Apologies are connected to remorse and recognition of wrongdoing. But by apologizing the offender attempts to get the victim to change her appropriate negative emotion, which if he is repentant, he has no reason to do since he thinks the negative emotion is an apt response. In other words, if the wrongdoer recognizes the wrongdoing and is truly repentant, he will not try to get the victim to cease morally protesting the wrongdoing by forgiving him. Truly repentant people will not apologize if they also morally protest the wrongdoing. Hallich claims that attempts by philosophers at solving the dilemma are futile. He concludes, “An offender who recognizes his own guilt has no rational reason for asking for forgiveness.” It

¹⁵ Hallich’s account of the paradox of apologies is quite different from Janna Thompson’s (2002) account. Thompson describes the paradox as follows: when we apologize we express regret that an event happened. By apologizing for historical injustices committed by our ancestors (e.g. slavery and the dispossession of indigenous peoples), we express regret for what they did. However, if the events had not happened, we would not exist. If we are glad to be alive, then how can we regret our own existence? Thompson’s solution to the paradox is that apologies in these cases should not be regrets for the act but rather regrets that one benefits as a result of the injustice.

is important to note that Hallich defines apologies as requests for forgiveness. He conflates the two practices. However, it is this conflation that causes the paradox.

I am inclined to think that apologies are only unreasonable when they are implicit requests. In offering an apology, an offender acknowledges and condemns the wrongdoing and validates the victim's beliefs. The apology does not attempt to change the victim's apt feelings towards the wrongdoing but rather it confirms that the victim has a reason to feel that way and the offender recognizes this as well. On the other hand, I do think that asking for the victim's forgiveness is an attempt at bringing about a state of affairs that the requester should have no moral reason to bring about. Requests are much more open to this criticism than apologies. Recognizing the distinct features of apologies and requests helps us understand why attempting to offer a solution to the paradox of apologies is futile. It is futile because the paradox is not a paradox of apologies but actually a paradox of requesting forgiveness.

The distinction between apologies and forgiveness requests is also important because it helps us recognize that criticisms of apologies and the question of who has the standing to apologize will by definition not apply to requests. A separate analysis is necessary. For example, while we can at least imagine third parties asking for or about a victims' forgiveness, we expect apologies to be made by the offending party or at least those who have parental or ownership responsibilities to the offending party (e.g. parent of a child or owner of a pet). While third parties can corroborate a change of heart or apportion blame, this will have a different meaning when performed by someone other than the offender. "Only the offender can denounce her own commitment to the wrong ... promise she will never do it again ... build trust ... undertake her own moral transformation" (Smith 2008, 52). If this sounds tenable, then only offenders have the standing to apologize but the

standing to request forgiveness can apply more broadly to others. So who has the standing to request forgiveness? It is to this question that I now turn.

2. **The Standing to Make Forgiveness Requests**

As I have noted above, one of the upshots of arguing that requests and apologies are distinct is that it will help us see that answering the question of who has the standing to apologize may not apply directly to forgiveness requests. Although I will rely on the apology literature in answering the questions “Who has the standing to request forgiveness?” and “What are the appropriate forms for requesting forgiveness?” at certain points in this chapter, there are no guarantees that we will get parallel responses to similar questions about apologies. As you will see further, we will not.¹⁶ By ‘requesting forgiveness’ I mean two things: asking *for* forgiveness and asking *about* forgiveness. This will be clearer as we go along.

So how might we answer our standing question? It seems that the intuitive answer is that only a certain kind of offender, one with direct responsibility, has the standing to request forgiveness. We think the offender has this standing because he is blameworthy. In this section, I question this assumption and widen the list of possible agents as well as forms of requests. However, this is not the end of the story. Having the standing to request lets us know who may request forgiveness but it does not tell us what requests are morally permissible for them to make. In the next section I will consider what appropriate forms of

¹⁶ However, philosophers who have done work on apologies do provide much insight and inspiration.

requests apply to each group, if any at all.¹⁷ But for now, let us consider the *who* question, before we consider the *what* question.

One might think that an offender has the standing to request forgiveness because they are responsible for the wrongdoing and thus a proper target of blame. In the case of offenders, A is asking B to forgive A, and not necessarily anyone else who is blamable for what happened to B. I define offenders first as those with attributive responsibility and those with substantive responsibility (Scanlon 1998, 248-251). According to T. M. Scanlon, to be attributively responsible is for the outcome of my actions to be attributable to me. I had a certain causal role in bringing about a state of affairs. I am, for example, attributively responsible for this chapter. Likewise, a person is attributively responsible for the causal role they have in inflicting violence on others. But one could have a causal role but not be blameworthy. If I am acting under duress, sleepwalking, or under the influence of drugs, I may be causally responsible but not morally responsible. This is because in sleepwalking, for example, I am not responsive to reasons.¹⁸ Therefore, I may be excused from blame. For a person to be substantively responsible is to say that the person has certain obligations or duties. I am substantively responsible for completing a dissertation. For Scanlon, this

¹⁷ By ‘standing to request’ I mean who is ‘qualified’ to request forgiveness. I am implying here that requesting is positional – it depends on the relationship between the requester and the victim. This positional view is very much similar to literature on blame that argues that blame can be undermined due to meddling. It is just none of some people’s business to blame. It isn’t their place to interfere. See Scanlon (2008) and Radzik (2011). Similarly, not just anyone has the standing to make forgiveness requests. It depends on their relationship to the victim. However, I do not think this is all that is required. Forms of the requests matter. This view is similar to procedural norms in the blame literature that argue that the way in which X goes about blaming matters. My view is also inspired by Macalester Bell’s argument that the standing to blame is not only positional but depends on additional responsibilities. See Bell (2012).

¹⁸ There is debate on what makes us moral agents and therefore morally responsible. Here I provide the weakest argument for moral agency.

type of responsibility is *substantive* because it expresses “substantive claims about what people are required ... or not required to do” (248). To not write it is to be blameworthy because I have neglected one of my responsibilities. Similarly, a parent has a duty to watch over their children and a homeowner has an obligation to care for their property in ways that will not harm others. Thus, a parent may request forgiveness from their adult friend if their two-year-old throws the friend’s phone into the toilet. A homeowner may request forgiveness from a neighbor who has fallen down his or her unsalted icy steps. The standing to request forgiveness is based on the fact that the parent and homeowner had substantive responsibility to watch their child’s actions and to put salt on their steps within a certain period after it snows.

There are also *complicit offenders*. Complicit offenders are complicit in that they “intentionally participates in a collective that causes harm.”¹⁹ An individual bomber who is part of a team of bombers is a complicit offender in the death of civilians even if their individual bomb did not cause any fatalities. The bomber may then request forgiveness for the deaths even though their individual bombs did not kill anyone. I will also add that individuals who are complicit in wrongdoing such as an administrator who covers up or protects their sexual harassing boss intentionally is responsible for the part they played in the boss’s harm or his continuation of harms.²⁰ Given this responsibility, the administrator also has the standing to request forgiveness.

Third parties with a responsibility link to the wrongdoing also have the standing to request forgiveness. A responsibility link occurs when there is what I will refer to as a

¹⁹ This is described as the “complicity principle”. See Kutz (2000).

²⁰ This is not to say that their wrongdoing is equal or that they are responsible in the same way.

particular ‘positional link’ between third parties and an offense. A school official may request forgiveness from a visiting school for his students shouting racial slurs directed at them at a basketball game. A Chief of Police may request forgiveness from a victim of police brutality for the brutal acts of violence that her officers engaged in. Although the school official and the Chief of Police were not directly involved in the offenses and may have done their best to try to prevent such actions, it is because their *position* makes them indirectly responsible for the actions of those they lead or are in charge of.²¹ This responsibility link is a link that is inherited due to their position. When a third party has a responsibility link to the offense, they also have the standing to request forgiveness for the offense.

‘Vulnerables’ also have the standing to request forgiveness. In the vulnerable case, A is asking B to forgive C, who is blamable for something done to B (though perhaps also done to A). On my view, ‘vulnerables’ are those who will be affected by forgiveness.²² Vulnerables are those whose life will go worse due to a lack of forgiveness.²³ This may sound too broad so I will briefly qualify the claim.

I take it that there is a difference between conferrals of pure benefits and preventions of harm. I may make forgiveness requests because of an economic interest (e.g., I request that my father and uncle forgive each other so I can stand to receive an inheritance). The forgiveness will allow my life to go much better financially. I may also request forgiveness because I do not want the family relationship to be ruptured. Such a rupture would harm our family and forgiveness will prevent that harm. My claim is connected to the latter

²¹ Being responsible and liable are two different things. The Chief of Police may be responsible for the officer’s actions but not liable.

²² Although Pettigrove does not use this term, he introduces this idea in his attempt to answer the question of who has the standing to forgive.

²³ My language is not meant to represent a particular threshold view.

prudential claim and not the conferral of benefit claim. I am only interested in one's life going worse as it relates to certain harms like community damage, physical violence, relationship disruption, and not in the ways that may affect us superficially. Therefore, I conclude that I am a vulnerable in the ruptured family case but not in the inheritance case (Michael R., personal communication, 2017).

While a victim could be both a vulnerable and a victim because their forgiveness will have an impact on their lives, I omit them from this category since I am not interested in how one's forgiveness will have an impact on one's self but on others. While it is also true that offenders can be 'vulnerables' since the victim's forgiveness will affect them too, I leave offenders out of this category for several reasons.

First, I want to reserve the term 'vulnerables' for those who have no role in the offense but are affected by the offense. There are two ways in which one can be affected by an offense. One can be *directly* affected by the wrongdoing. We refer to these vulnerables as victims. But one can be indirectly affected by the wrongdoing in which one suffers because of the ways relationships were altered by the wrong action. Within this indirect category of vulnerables are the victim's family members and members of the community. These vulnerables are affected in different ways. The family member suffers because they have lost a brother or sister. Members of the community are affected by their lost of security. Second, to place offenders in this category may grant them certain liberties that obscure their role as offender. Third, to speak of offenders as vulnerables minimizes their responsibilities as an offender—for if they are in the category of 'vulnerables', it would only be because of their own wrongdoing. For these reasons, I refer to offenders as 'offenders' instead of 'vulnerables.'

Vulnerables are those people the quality of whose lives—present and future—depends on the answer to the request. I am thinking of children who may ask their parents to forgive each other. The child is not a wrongdoer or responsible for wrongdoing but the answer to the question will have an effect on their future in that the answer is relevant to their basic well-being. However, this standing is rooted in vulnerability and not merely interest. Therefore, while this would work in the child case I am skeptical that it would work in other cases in which, for example, the requester is the parent's banker. One is not a vulnerable because she is *interested* in a party's forgiveness. I can be interested for reasons of entertainment or information consumption. Imagine a gossiping colleague asking his co-worker—who is not his friend—to forgive her partner. He may ask because he likes happy endings or wants to spark up a conversation. The news that she has not forgiven may make him sad in the moment, disappoint him, or make him skeptical of marriage. However, his life will not go worse because of her forgiveness.²⁴ Therefore, he does not have the standing to request forgiveness.

Children are not the only examples of vulnerables. Vulnerables are a larger class that also includes adult citizens such as members of an organization, neighborhood, or nation. Consider this example. Privilege Hills is a small suburban community in Long Island, New York. A group of neighbors has been quarreling with each other for the last two years. As a result, children are afraid to play on their street. Homeowner meetings are often disruptive and unproductive. Recently, anonymous persons have been slightly

²⁴ I do not want to start a causal debate here or argue about the degree to which people's actions can affect us in many indirect ways, ways that we may not be aware of. I acknowledge this possibility yet I do not think it's a problem for my argument. For the sake of my argument, I am concerned about the evident and reasonable ways a rational person can foresee that the act of forgiveness or lack thereof can affect their life in a particular way. Any other focus on the indirect effects, will only take us off the beaten path.

vandalizing property (rumor has it that Bob drew graffiti on Brian's 'Trump for President' sign). Khadijah, a new resident, does not want to live in such an inharmonious environment. It is affecting where her children can play, whom she can collaborate with, and her overall peace in the community. Khadijah is a vulnerable. If the neighbors decide to forgive each other, Khadijah's life will no longer go worse in this respect. Her neighborhood will no longer be inharmonious or the meetings will no longer be unsafe. If the neighbors decide not to forgive each other, Khadijah's life will continue to go worse. She will continue to feel unsafe. Her children's fear will remain. As a vulnerable, Khadijah has the standing to request forgiveness.

Not all vulnerables will be vulnerable in the same way or to the same degree. Khadijah may be more vulnerable than her partner who is overseas at the moment. She also may be more vulnerable than her neighbor Tim, who lives several blocks over from the other neighbors involved. Nonetheless, Tim and Khadijah's partner are still vulnerables. However, someone who lives in another part of town, whose life is not affected by what this neighborhood does, is not a vulnerable.

Let's apply this to a political case. After the bombing of four girls in a Birmingham church in 1960, the whole city of Birmingham became vulnerables. Their life was likely to go worse depending on how their family and others responded to the wrongdoing. Perhaps we could say that both white and black citizens in Birmingham were vulnerables. Given the racial nature of the bombing and the tension it caused nationally, other citizens in the United States were also vulnerables.²⁵ The degree to which they were vulnerables varied.

²⁵ A criticism of Martin Luther King Jr. was that he was an 'outsider' who was coming to other cities in the South to start trouble. My account of vulnerables seeks to capture why we have reason to resist this description not only of King but also others. Although a person

It is not clear if whites or blacks were more vulnerable or if southerners or northerners were more vulnerable. I do not think I have to settle this debate here. What is important to note is that the fact that there are different types of vulnerables does not lessen vulnerables' standing to request forgiveness.

Entrusted parties also have the standing to request forgiveness. I am thinking about a conflict mediator that the victim and/or offender has invited to aid in reconciliation. The entrusted party could be a minister, friend, therapist, or professional mediator. The entrusted party has the standing to request forgiveness because if forgiveness may lead to release for the victim, relief of guilt for the offender, or repair between both, the request is relevant to their mutual goals. This standing only refers to the offender or victim who invites the entrusted party into his or her private world. The victim's therapist has the standing to ask that the victim forgives only if the victim is her client. However, a therapist of the offender does not have the standing to ask that the victim forgives. This is because the therapist is not an entrusted party of the victim but rather the offender. A mediator hired by both parties has the standing to request forgiveness of the victim. However, if the victim

may not be an official or accepted member of any community, this doesn't negate the fact that they can be vulnerable to the actions of that community. David Walker (1829) indirectly highlights the ways in which white Americans in the 19th century were vulnerable to blacks' forgiveness. Walker notes that for whites there is a fear that blacks will one day rise up in revenge. He notes, "they (the whites) know that they have done us so much injury, they are afraid that we, being men, and not brutes, will retaliate, and woe will be to them." During slavery this was a justified fear. There were slave uprisings. On Walker's account, it was this justified fear of violence (on behalf of 'good' and not so 'good' whites) that made them vulnerables. However, we should be careful with defining vulnerables by what *could* happen. I reserve the category 'vulnerables' to those whose life is *likely* to go worse and not for those whose life could go worse. It is not an all-encompassing concept.

refuses to undergo such a mediation process, the mediator does not have the standing to request forgiveness.

3. **Appropriate Forms of the Requests**

So far I have argued that offenders, third parties with a responsibility link, complicit offenders, vulnerables, and entrusted parties have the standing to request forgiveness. However, it is not enough that a person has the standing to request forgiveness. What form the request takes matters.²⁶ In this section, I consider the appropriateness of requests when they are demands, inquiries, and pleas. I also point out when the form of the requests can be deceptive—for not all demands, inquiries, and pleas are alike. Forgiveness requests, as I see it, fall into two categories: requests *for* and requests *about* forgiveness. Demands and pleas fall under the ‘for’ category. Inquiries fall under the ‘about’ category. I will argue that those who have the standing to request forgiveness may or may not have the standing to issue a particular kind of request.

3.1 **Requests as Demands and Commands**

Requests *for* forgiveness can be described as *demands*. If the requests are demands, in some cases, no one has the standing to make the requests. There are two ways in which we can view requests as demands: in the *blame sense* and the *command sense*. Juha Raikka (2012) claims that demands for forgiveness are not simply requests for forgiveness but that in demanding forgiveness the offender blames the victim.²⁷ On his view, to demand forgiveness is to blame the victim for not forgiving. It may be blameworthy, according to

²⁶ My argument going forward takes for granted that the requests will follow certain conventions such as politeness and will occur in fitting and relevant spaces.

²⁷ See also Bovens (2009).

Raikka, not to forgive and so demanding forgiveness in this case may not be morally problematic. A victim may be blameworthy for not forgiving if the harm is relatively slight, followed by an apology, and if not being forgiven may damage an important relationship. If this is the case, demanding forgiveness in the blame sense is appropriate.

However, not all acts of wrongdoing are slights. In addition, we must be careful what we term slights. Not calling on a co-worker when she raises her hand may be perceived as merely a slight. But when done consistently it is no longer a slight but a repeated pattern of wrongdoing in which one ignores or suppresses the opinion and contributions of another. If it is a woman or person of color, what may be termed a slight could actually be discrimination, prejudice, or epistemic injustice. However, a slight does not have to be repeated to be morally suspect. Consider microaggressions. Microaggressions are a subtle form of bias – “brief and pervasive verbal, behavioral or environmental slights that—intentionally or not—communicate hostility” (Martin 2011, 38). What is micro about these aggressions? Perhaps for others, the ‘micro’ nature of these slights is due to their unintentional or subtle nature or because they occur every day. However, they leave lasting hurts. Microaggressions can also be psychologically painful. “They tend to be found to impair performance in education, employment and [access to] health care by breeding inequities” (38). If they were only ‘slights’ they would not have such an impact. It is also not always easy to tell the difference between slights and wrongdoing in all cases.

The acts that I am concerned with in this dissertation are acts of violence and we can easily set aside the view that one can be blameworthy for not forgiving acts of

violence.²⁸ Moreover, requests for forgiveness in these cases are often made, not because the offender has apologized but despite the lack of an apology. Therefore, if blaming is permissible according to Raikka based on the nature of the offense and the presence of an apology, then blaming victims for not forgiving is always inappropriate in the violent cases I raise as well as in other similar cases. Those who have the standing to request forgiveness in these cases do not have the standing to demand forgiveness in the blame sense.

There is also demand in the *command sense*. An example of demands in the command sense is a teenager confessing to a caregiver that she has been sexually assaulted by someone in the home, and the caregiver responding with “Let it go!”, “You should get over it!” or simply “Forgive and forget!” Another example of demands in the command sense is a religious leader telling his followers to forgive an offender simply because God told them to or “because he is their leader”. Griswold argues that demands as commands for forgiveness manifest a lack of respect for the victim in getting the victim to bend to the will of the offender (Griswold 2007). As a matter of respect, the offender (and others) owes it to the

²⁸ My mention of violence may sound too broad. I recognize that there are different forms of violence so I do want to allow that there are certain circumstances in which one may be blameworthy for not forgiving acts of violence. For example, siblings may be blameworthy for not forgiving each other after a fight. But I take it that more often than not what is behind this judgment is not just the type of violence but also the relationship and history of the agents. I doubt that we will assign the same blame as we do in the sibling case to a woman who decides not to forgive a male stranger for assaulting her.

My claim may appear to have major implications in the realm of criminal justice. But this is only an appearance. As R.A. Duff (2003) articulates in *Punishment, Communication, and Community*, part of the problem with mass incarceration is that the public refuses to forgive offenders. I agree with Duff and I think this is a major issue with collateral consequences of incarceration which are legal obstacles that the formerly incarcerated face after returning home from prison. For example, many are often unable to hold certain work licenses, a driver’s license, or vote because they are convicted felons. But since the offender has ‘served his time’, we expect that society will welcome them back. However, I think that offenses against the public are different from offenses against the victim. So while the public can be blameworthy for not forgiving violent offenders, this does not mean that victims are.

victim to emphasize their understanding of the wrongdoing and to try not to coerce the victim. As a result, commanding that a victim forgives can be inappropriate. The use of the category ‘slights’ above suggests that I am working with objective standards of what count as major and minor wrongs. That is to say, it is not just up to the victim’s subjective assessment. If this is the case, I also think that an objectively constructed set of virtues demand that only certain kinds of feelings of grievance are in fact (objectively) justified. Imagine someone whose personality is such that they react disproportionately to what by any reasonable standard are minor slights (as against microaggressions), and is completely unforgiving. We can imagine a friend, or even just an associate of this person, with a more objective view of the triviality of the wrong done, saying “For God’s sake, just let it go!” Although this is a command, it would not be inappropriate on their part.

Moreover, demands for forgiveness in the command sense can also show a lack of respect for the moral order in getting the moral order to bend towards the will of the requester. By moral order, I mean the recognition of what is acceptable treatment between persons (Murphy 2003a, 20). When we hold people accountable for wrongdoing, it is a testimony to our commitment to the moral order. When we command that others forgive wrongdoing, we can make our will superior to the moral order. What is most important is not what is respectable treatment among persons, but what is respectable treatment towards the requester—that a hearer gives into their command. But there can also be circumstances where our will *recognizes* the moral order (and the utterly disproportionate nature of the victim’s response) as in the case of the unforgiving personality. This is determined by objective/intersubjective standards, at least within a given culture.

As a result, one of the important differences between demands in the blame sense and demands in the command sense is that demands in the blame sense often appeal to

moral reasons. One demands forgiveness because it may be good for a relationship, the offender has apologized, or it was only a slight. Commands, on the other hand, do not have to appeal to any reasons. But one could imagine circumstances where they do. It is the authority of the person who makes the command and not the reasons or consequences provided that gives the command its force. While an authority figure may command an order, those who have the standing to request forgiveness do not always have the standing to demand forgiveness in the command sense.²⁹

3.2 ***Requests as Inquiries***

Requests *about* forgiveness may take the form of *inquiries*. The questions, “Do you think you can forgive going forward?” or “Can you find it in your heart to forgive?” are examples of what I have in mind. There are three types of inquiries: predictive inquiries, introspective inquiries, and check-ins.

In a predictive inquiry, an agent is asking what the individual will do in the future. A requester is making a predictive inquiry in the question “Do you think you can forgive going forward?” It is appropriate for those who have the standing to request forgiveness to ask a predictive inquiry. There are three reasons why this is so.

First, predictive inquiries do not ask that victims forgive now but they ask what the victims will do in the future. Predictive inquiries are more likely to lessen or eliminate the

²⁹ I do not have space to discuss this in detail here but I wonder to what extent we can call what is being commanded ‘forgiveness’. If ‘forgiveness’ is commanded it is not ‘elective’ forgiveness - forgiveness that is a gift. Nor is it ‘earned forgiveness’ - forgiveness that comes about because of remorse, etc. What kind of forgiveness it is or whether it is forgiveness at all is a topic worthy of future research.

social pressure³⁰ that a forgiveness “now” request creates. They do not ask that victims hurry up and make a decision to forgive right after the speaker utters the request. Predictive inquiries allow victims to guesstimate what they will or will not do in the future. They do not put the victims in the position of having to make a moral commitment right now.

Second, predictive inquiries make it so that if the victim says “yes” and yet does not forgive in the future, the victim has not lied. The predictive inquiry does not hold the victim to certain truth commitments. If I ask you, for example, if you think that you will ever forgive your estranged brother in the future, you may say ‘no’. If you happen to forgive in the future, you would not have lied to me when you said ‘no’. To lie is to assert something you believe to be false; however, you did not do such a thing. In this case, you only reported to me what you thought you *would do* in the future. It could be argued that by saying “I think I will do X in the future” I am committing myself to future action or beginning to make the choice to do so. Although I do think that saying “I think I will forgive” expresses a commitment, saying “I think I will forgive in the future” can be more accurately interpreted as a hedged commitment. A hedged commitment is a weaker commitment.³¹ It takes into consideration that there may be a chance that the commitment may not be fulfilled. For example, it considers that forgiveness may be difficult to do, certain outside

³⁰ My point here is not that predictive inquiries will never come with social pressure but that they may come with less pressure than requests for forgiveness. An objection may be that a predictive inquiry implies that I think you should forgive and that amounts to a certain amount of social pressure. However, this is not always the case. I may ask an abusive friend if he will ever forgive his abusive boss. This is not to say that my predictive inquiry implies that I think he should forgive. I may be asking to survey if he will forgive with the belief that I don't think he should. I may be asking out of concern and with the hope that he says “No” to my inquiry.

³¹ See Benton (2011) and McCready (2015) for more on hedges. I am aware that some philosophers of language will disagree with me, particularly those who think it violates a Gricean norm of conversation to think there is a difference between saying “I think I will” and “I will”. See McKinnon (2015).

conditions may not be met, or that the victim may not know how he will feel months from now. The victim in his response anticipates that these may block him from the act. If the victim responds not with a ‘yes or no’ but with “I will try” instead, the commitment is in him failing to try to forgive and not in him failing to forgive.

Third, the predictive inquiry can provide an opportunity for the victim to present his or her own justified moral preconditions. The question “Do you think you can forgive going forward?” opens up a dialogue in which the victim can say “Perhaps I can forgive *if* X.” Victims are often not given the opportunity to articulate their needs or what they see as possibilities for redress. This may be because others in official capacities speak for them, victims are often times not asked, or victims do not make their victimization public for fear of being blamed or not believed. However, this type of request can provide an opportunity for them to speak. It can introduce the victim’s needs into the conversation and may provide the victim with power—a power that is often taken from them because of wrongdoing.

This is not to say that the predictive inquiry will never be articulated in indirect ways. For example, I may say, “Please forgive!” *by asking*, “Do you think you can one day forgive him?” My request may only take the predictive form in order to be polite, to show respect for the victim, or out of recognition of the delicacy of the situation. I am of the view that in direct and indirect speech acts hearers (victims) will understand the speech act and respond accordingly, although this is not always the case. Misfiring and miscommunication does occur. This is not an objection to my view. What it proves is that indirect use of the predictive inquiry shows that the form of the request alone does not determine its appropriateness. If the predictive inquiry is an indirect request for forgiveness then, as I will

argue, it will depend on the kind of request *for* forgiveness it is that determines who has the standing to make it.

Not all predictive inquiries are created equal. It may be appropriate for those who have the standing to ask “Do you think you can forgive going forward?” but the predictive inquiry asked with a tone of curiosity as oppose to a tone of authority will have an effect on its appropriateness. The former communicates that one is asking what another will do in the future. The latter also communicates the same thing but the authoritative tone adds an additional communicative force with it—a request in the blame sense.

The request “Can you find it in your heart to forgive?” is different from “Do you think you can forgive going forward?” In the first question, the requester is asking to gain access into the private life of the offended. It is not a predictive inquiry but rather an introspective *inquiry*. Introspective inquiries are requests for access into the inner world of an individual. It is asking to gain permission to another’s mental and emotional closets. Examples of everyday introspective inquires are a woman asking her sister what is on her mind or a therapist asking if her patient can find it in himself to love again. These requests do not seem inappropriate. This is because of the nature of the inquiry and who is making the request. The position of these individuals in the lives of the other gives them implicit permission to enter into their sister’s or patient’s inner world. But it doesn't give them unlimited access. Some inquiries are too personal. What may be jarring is witnessing a stranger ask a woman, “Can you find it in your heart to love again?” It sounds intrusive. The stranger is asking to gain access to something he does not have permission to obtain.

Given the nature of an introspective inquiry, not everyone with the standing to request forgiveness can make introspective inquiries. Entrusted parties can make introspective inquires because they have been entrusted to enter into the private life of the

individual. However, only those who have an invitation by the victim to enter their inner world can make the introspective inquiry.³² Usually these invitations are restricted to intimates.³³ One may think that prefacing the introspective inquiry in the company of only the victim by asking, “Can I ask you an introspective question?” may grant them standing. I resist this move. If this is tenable, then how can we know which parts the other person wants to keep strictly to herself without asking questions? Once again, I think the relationship will determine *who* gets to ask this question. But I also think that certain social conventions will determine what *kinds* of questions we get to ask. If I do not have a certain kind of intimacy with another, I cannot ask the introspective inquiry. But I also should follow conventions of reticence when it comes to questions. According to Nagel (1998), such conventions ‘keep us out of each other’s face.’ But they are also important for our humanity. He writes:

We don't want to expose ourselves completely to strangers even if we don't fear their disapproval, hostility, or disgust. Naked exposure itself, whether or not it arouses disapproval, is disqualifying. The boundary between what we reveal and what we do not, and some control over that boundary, are among the most important attributes of our humanity (17).

We do not want to expose every aspect of our inner life to complete strangers. Even if the introspective question does not burden, pressure, or embarrass us, there should still be

³² This is not to say that vulnerables will not have this standing. But they will only have this standing by virtue of their position as an entrusted party (i.e. professionals and intimates who are given permission).

³³ Nagel (1998) thinks that one of the roles of intimacy is this exposure. He writes: “intimacy also plays an important part in the development of an articulate inner life, because it permits one to explore unpublic feelings in something other than solitude, and to learn about the comparable feelings of one's intimates, including to a degree their feelings toward oneself. Intimacy in its various forms is a partial lifting of the usual veil of reticence. It provides the indispensable setting for certain types of relations, and also a relief from the strains of public demeanor, which can grow burdensome however habitual it has become” (20).

certain boundaries to what can be asked of and about us. Part of being human is knowing that not just anyone has access to our inner life and that there are boundaries to what others can know and ask of us. Nagel continues:

Humans are the only animals that don't as a rule copulate in public. And humans clothe themselves, in one way or another, even if it is only with paint, offering a self-presentation rather than their nakedness to the public gaze. The awareness of how one appears from outside is a constant of human life, sometimes burdensome, sometimes an indispensable resource. But there are aspects of life which require that we be free of it, in order that we may live and react entirely from the inside. They include sexual life in its most unconstrained form and the more extreme aspects of emotional life-fundamental anxieties about oneself, fear of death, personal rage, remorse, and grief. All these have muted public forms, and sometimes, as with collective grief, they serve an important function for the inner life, but the full private reality needs protection-not primarily from the knowledge but from the direct perception of others (18).

Only those invited by the victim to enter into their private lives may ask the introspective inquiry (entrusted parties). This is because the standing to ask the introspective inquiry depends on the relationship *and* conventions of reticence that aim to provide to humans protection of their inner life.

Requests for forgiveness can also be *check-ins*. By check-ins, I mean an inquiry into how the victim is doing with her forgiveness. It may take the following form: “Have you forgiven me yet?” Check-ins are different from predictive inquiries in that with check-ins, the requester is not asking if the victim *will* forgive but if the victim *has* forgiven.

Check-ins are appropriate when they aim for mutual confirmation. Consider Carse and Tirrell’s (2010) example of Berta, the wife of a génocidaire prisoner and Aimee, a Rwandan genocide survival:

‘Have you forgiven me?’ ... When Berta finally asks the forgiveness question; she is not so much seeking a decision from Aimee, as seeking mutual confirmation of the forgiveness already expressed in Aimee’s actions (54).

Check-ins are appropriate in this context because they are only seeking verbal confirmation of what has already been stated in action. The check-in wants to uncover what has been expressed but not yet verbally articulated.

Check-ins may also be important in gaining clarity. If the offender thinks he has been forgiven but actually has not been, his assumption can lead to moral problems. For example, in thinking the relationship has been restored, he may cross certain lines that the victim is not yet ready to cross. This can take away the agency of the potential forgiver and add additional injury. Check-ins are helpful in this regard if there is evidence to suggest that forgiveness *may* have occurred yet one is not certain that it has.

However, when an offender knows he has not been forgiven (there is no evidence to inspire confirmation) but makes the check-in anyway, it is inappropriate. Inappropriate check-ins can rush victims to forgive. They can be made to speed up the process or to get the victim on the timeline of the requester. These check-ins can remind the victim that she is too slow with her forgiveness or that she should have forgiven already. Check-ins of this kind express the impatience of the requester and are insensitive to victims. Not all check-ins are created equal. Check-ins made repetitively, even with evidence, are inappropriate. They too can be used to rush victims to forgive.

3.3 Requests as Pleas

Requests for forgiveness can also be *pleas*. A plea is asking *for* forgiveness. Pleas can take the form of asking for forgiveness *repeatedly* or emotionally *begging* for it. I think these pleas are always inappropriate. But pleas can also take the form of a polite invitation to

forgive.³⁴ I will refer to these types of pleas as invitations. Is it appropriate for offenders and third parties with a responsibility link to make a plea³⁵ as an invitation to victims? I will argue that invitations are appropriate; however they are objectionable when certain conditions have not been met. Even when conditions are met, invitations may burden victims and can be a moral test for victims. By moral test, I mean that the speaker asks the question in order to get the victim to prove how moral they are. Invitations can also inappropriately pressure victims and are often insensitive. Thus, I will argue that those who have the standing to request forgiveness can make invitations but should be aware of their moral risks and when they are objectionable.

Invitations are objectionable when they are expressed without certain conditions having been met first. For example, a requester may make a request for forgiveness to a widow the day after her husband is murdered. What is inappropriate about the request is that it was made too soon. The requester failed to meet the condition of waiting for an appropriate time to make the request. As a result, the requester actually made a request for hasty and uncritical forgiveness—forgiveness that philosophers like Murphy (2003a) and Griswold (2007) have argued shows a lack of respect for the potential forgiver because it asks that victims *quickly* give up affective responses to the wrongdoing. Pleas as invitations can also be insensitive. This can occur when the offender thinks the request itself can do the job of quick reconciliation without taking into account the pain they have caused and the difficulty of getting over such pain.

³⁴ I recognize that the word ‘plea’ has an urgent and emotive ring to it. Once again, I am not using it in the normal way.

³⁵ For the rest of this chapter I will refer to this form of pleas as invitations or simply ‘pleas’ since I have ruled out the other forms.

Invitations can also be expressed absent other conditions that need to be met in order to warrant forgiveness. For example, a victim of police brutality may be asked to forgive the officer and complicit members of the police force. However, if the officers have not admitted any wrongdoing, shown that they denounce the wrongdoing, and taken steps to improve their behavior, then making a plea for the victim to forgive would be inappropriate. It is inappropriate because the victim is being asked to do something that the offender has not given him moral reasons to do.³⁶

The requester and the victim may disagree on what those conditions are. The requester may think that forgiveness should always be unilateral and unconditional. The victim, however, may believe that forgiveness is bilateral. It might be argued, therefore, that pleas are not inappropriate in these cases. What is actually happening is disagreement about what forgiveness requires. However, I think what is objectionable about pleas in this case is not the presence of a disagreement but that the requester is either uninterested in conditions or does not think that any conditions should be met in the first place. Political cases like the one above are a perfect example of this. Jeffrey Blustein (2014) argues that there is a difference between projects of forgiveness and conditions for forgiveness (165-167). On his view, projects of forgiveness are initiatives that call for forgiveness. A state campaign that places inspirational flyers on subway trains in order to encourage or ask that people forgive would be a project of forgiveness. However, conditions for forgiveness are different. Conditions for forgiveness focus on fixing the problem that brought about the wrongdoing. They seek to provide reasons for people to forgive. For example, instead of

³⁶ I am not arguing that this standard necessarily holds for victims. While I argue that invitations should not be made without certain conditions being met, I do not argue that victims should forgive or not forgive without certain met conditions.

using flyers that say “Please Forgive”, the state provides conditions for forgiveness by passing legislation, apologizing, or providing reparations. Blustein claims that projects of forgiveness *only* encourage citizens to forgive but they do not address the systematic injustice that created the wrongdoing. By refusing to do so, they can make citizens’ future victimhood more likely. I think that invitations for forgiveness alone can be examples of projects of forgiveness and not conditions for forgiveness. What is objectionable about invitations—absent satisfied conditions—is that they can communicate that the requester is not interested in the problem being solved or the victim being protected. What appears to be most important for the requester is only the victim’s forgiveness. What is also objectionable about these pleas is the implicit assumption that forgiveness is *the* response to wrongdoing. However, “forgiveness is an incomplete and insufficient response to systematic or structural injustice and oppression” (167). Fixing the injustice and oppression that created victimization requires accountability, justice, and change. When requests for forgiveness are made without attending to these conditions, they can show a lack of concern for the victims and justice. When conditions are met and taken up seriously, requests plus these met conditions show respect for victims and justice.

It is not just unmet conditions that make some invitations inappropriate. Let us return to the distinction between apologies and requests for forgiveness. As I have argued in section 1, apologies are victim-oriented and requests for forgiveness are perpetrator-oriented. Pleas without unmet conditions from offenders are then self-directed. They focus on the needs of the requesting offender. They are about what the requester wants. In an apology, the wrongdoer brings an offering to the victim and backs away. If forgiveness follows, that is a good thing. If not, bringing the offering was still the right thing to do. However, invitations for forgiveness without any met conditions are different. The

requester does not bring anything to the victim but the request itself.³⁷ The requester may expect that the victim will give him an offering: forgiveness. While I agree that pleas from a vulnerable or an entrusted party are not perpetrator-oriented but could be a call for moral repair for social harmony, we have reasons to doubt the content of the request and at whom it is directed when conditions are not met or considered. For example, if conditions are unmet, the third party, in requesting that the victim forgives, may be aiming for superficial repair—a kind of repair that does not address wrongdoing, healing for the victim, and restoration of relationships but only provides the appearance of repair, or temporary repair. They could also be seeking a cognitive and an emotional relief only for themselves and not for the victim. While I do not object to forgiveness, I do object to overburdening victims. So much is taken from victims through victimization. Requesting that victims continue to give can overburden them. Out of respect, we should give victims apologies, denunciations of wrongdoing, reparations, etc. What they decide to give us in return is their prerogative but asking *that they give* forgiveness when we give them nothing in return is excessive. Sharon Lamb (2002) articulates this burdening aspect of requests for forgiveness when she writes:

What exactly is he asking of the victim? ... It is a plea that the victim not be angry any longer; that he or she shows hope in his promise to change or to do better; and that the injured believe in the existence of a good inner character, separated from the offender's bad acts. Any of these expectations seems to be asking too much from a person and too much of a lone verbal act—"I forgive you" (167).

Invitations for forgiveness are also inappropriate when they are moral tests. They can be moral tests for victims when they are used to test the moral and political commitments of the victim. On this view, "Forgive me?" is a test question to assess how good the victim

³⁷ This is always the case when third parties make requests. This may not always be the case with offenders for they may apologize before the request. However, it is not the request that brings the offering, but the apology that follows.

really is. It is an oral exam where the victim is asked to show who they are and what they stand for. Unfortunately, invitations can have the effect of a moral test even when they are not intended to, particularly when they are presented to victims who are often made to prove their morality within a social context. Take for instance black men in the US. They are often perceived as threatening and criminal. An invitation may result in their feeling that they need to prove just how moral and therefore forgiving they are. Another socially positioned person—a white man—may not feel this communicative force.

Szablowinski (2012) claims that what I describe as invitations can also be morally problematic because they pressure victims and are often insensitive. We can imagine if one is *begging* or *asking repeatedly* for forgiveness how this can inappropriately pressure victims. But what about when it is an invitation? Is there still inapt pressure when after making an apology, an offender extends a plea in the form of an invitation to forgive. I am of the view that the pressure may be really high when the plea is preceded by an apology. The apology may make the victim feel that they must say yes to the request although they are not yet ready to forgive. The request can also pressure the victim if the victim is religious. They may feel that not saying “yes” is to not be a Christian, for example. The pressure to say ‘yes’ to the request can also increase if one feels that their response will have an effect, not only on the offender but also on other people in the community.³⁸

To prevent this from occurring Szablowinski argues that pleas must be preceded by (1) an apology; (2) an acknowledgement of the difficulty of granting forgiveness; and (3) an

³⁸ When a requester prefaces a request for forgiveness by alluding to the person’s religion, this is a form of inappropriate pressure. When the victim is put into a situation in which they (without consent) speak for a group and are then asked to forgive, this too can be inappropriate pressure.

acknowledgement of the possibility that the offended party may not yet be able to forgive (731-741). However, I think that adding (1) to a plea may not always lessen insensitivity and inappropriate pressure. An offender may apologize but continue to inflict harm. So apologies alone may not be enough.³⁹ Moreover, there are different kinds of apologies. An offender might want to extend a sincere apology, not just simply an apology.⁴⁰ Still, conditions (2) and (3) can be met by expressing a *hope for forgiveness* without requiring an invitation to forgive. In expressing a hope for forgiveness, the speaker articulates a desire for a forgiveness that is not impossible but yet not certain either. Unlike an invitation, expressing hope does not ask anything of the victim. Instead, it expresses a desire but does not request that the victim fulfills that desire.

If predictive inquiries can open up dialogue that can provide an opportunity for the victim to present his or her own justified moral preconditions, my interlocutor may assume that invitations can do the same. If an offender asks for forgiveness, the victim could respond by stating what they will need in order to forgive. I do not doubt that this can occur. However, because invitations have a certain nature and come with moral risks, if they are made they should be made with much care.

I do not think that all invitations are inappropriate. Requests for forgiveness that are invitations to forgive are appropriate for those who have the standing to request forgiveness. They are appropriate when they are not made immediately after the wrongdoing; when certain conditions have been met, when they do not serve as moral tests, and when they do not inappropriately pressure or are insensitive towards the victim.

³⁹ This will depend on the wrongdoing. If I have harmed you by stepping on your toe, an apology may be sufficient. However, I do not think this will work in cases of political violence.

⁴⁰ I am not committed to any accounts of what a 'sincere' apology amounts to.

However, because of the risks of making these pleas, I think it is best to consider expressing a hope for forgiveness and not an invitation. When invitations are extended, they should be made with much care by entrusted parties and vulnerables.

Table 1. **Standing to make private forgiveness requests**

| PRIVATE SPHERE | Demands in the Blame Sense (certain conditions) | Demands in the Blame Sense (serious wrongdoing) | Demands in the command sense | Predictive Inquiry | Introspective Inquiry | Check-ins | Pleas as repetitive asking & begging | Pleas as Invitation |
|-------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Offender | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 3 rd party w/ link | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Entrusted party | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Vulnerable | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |

4. **Public Forgiveness Requests**

So far I have argued that offenders, third parties with a responsibility link, entrusted parties, and vulnerables can make predictive inquiries and check-ins with evidence that there has already been forgiveness but not commands, demands, or pleas as repetitive asking and emotional begging. They can also only make demands in the blame sense under certain conditions such as when there is a slight, a prudential reason for forgiving, and when the wrongdoing is preceded by an apology. Only entrusted parties can make introspective inquiries. This all applies to the private sphere. Can the groups maintain their standing in the public sphere? In this section, I examine to what extent these groups have the standing to make public forgiveness requests.

There are two ways to view ‘public.’ Public can refer to an audience beyond two parties which includes an audience of invested individuals. This ‘public’ is usually a small group of individuals interested in reconciliation. I am thinking of people present at restorative justice hearings or a group of friends. There is also ‘public’ in the sense that includes strangers and a larger audience. I am thinking of people present at press conferences and the audience who may view it. I am also thinking of social media. In this sense, ‘public’ can also mean the political sphere.

Who the audience is may be entirely different to different players. They may be thinking of different audiences, but may also have a very different understanding of the same audience. For the requester, an audience could be the group to which they belong. For the victim, the public could be the group to which they belong. In the sense in which the requester and victim are clearly facing the same audience, the victim might view that audience as judgmental or hostile. The requester might view the audience as accepting. While it might not be easy for a requester to always know beforehand the victim’s interpretation of the audience, public requests requires a sensitivity to who the audience is in general and who the victim takes the audience to be in particular. This will have an effect on the appropriateness of the request. For example, it may be inappropriate for those who have the standing to make public requests to make a predictive inquiry to an Arab Muslim victim in front of an audience consisting exclusively of unrepentant white nationalists.

It is inappropriate for offenders and third parties with a responsibility link to make predictive inquiries, check-ins, and invitations in either sense of ‘public’ because of the pressure it can create, the danger of grandstanding, and narrative control. The inquiry that an offender and third party with a responsibility link make in private takes on a different significance in public. When the offender in public makes predictive inquiries, these

inquires can put pressure on the victim to give an answer that will please the crowd and not be a true account of what the victim actually thinks or feels. The victim may not be in a place where they can take the weight of responding. Perhaps because of trauma, shock, or grief the victim may not be able to take on the pressure.

The inquiry can also be an act of moral grandstanding. In moral grandstanding, one uses public speech to convince others that one is morally respectable. A grandstander aims to “get others to make certain desired judgments about oneself, namely, that one is worthy of respect or admiration because one has some particular moral quality” (Tosi and Warmke 2016, 199). While an offender may have lost some form of moral respectability through the wrongdoing, an offender or third party with a responsibility link can attempt to get it back through the inquiry. The public inquiry becomes a way to give the impression that one is now respectable enough that one would ask about forgiveness. One wants the audience to be impressed by his humility and interest in the victim’s forgiveness. Public inquiries can also put the narrative in the hands of the offender and the audience. When inquiries are made in public, the conversation can shift. The focus is no longer about the victim or the wrongdoing. The focus now becomes whether the victim thinks he can forgive or not. This also applies to demands in the blame sense.

Given the trust and privacy of their role, entrusted parties can only make these requests in private and in the first sense of ‘public.’ If a mediator is trying to reconcile two parties in counseling, their role is to do so in a private capacity. They do not have the standing to make public that which is private. It is a violation of trust. What goes on in the group should stay in the group. Private access granted to the entrusted party—whether that be friend or counselor—does not necessarily extend to the public domain.

Nevertheless, certain engagement with a victim and an entrusted party can in fact be made public. Consider South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC's goal was to provide a public record of wrongdoing; grant amnesty; and provide recommendations concerning reparations to victims.⁴¹ When victims participated in the public process, they agreed to tell their story to the entrusted parties publicly. But note that what they consented to beforehand was to provide facts about their lives and not facts about their forgiveness.⁴² Therefore, while the public inquiry of asking victims about their victimization in the TRC hearings was apt, it was not apt to ask about their forgiveness publicly. Many critics miss this point in their criticisms. However, I think this is one of the reasons many believed that publicly inquiring about forgiveness in the TRC was coercive and made forgiveness a kind of public property.

Although it is not apt for offenders, third parties with a responsibility link, and entrusted parties to make predictive inquiries, check-ins, and invitations in public this does not apply to vulnerables. It is apt for vulnerables to make these inquiries in both senses of public. They can make requests because their requests can be seen as requests on behalf of all vulnerables and as a way of inviting other vulnerables into a space that concerns them. In the cases that start chapter 1, reporters could be also be vulnerables and therefore they have the standing to make public requests. However, this does not apply to demands in the blame sense when certain conditions apply because of the potential that these demands will turn into public shaming.

⁴¹ More on this in the next chapter.

⁴² I do not think that, given the very name of the commission, testifiers knew they might be asked to grant forgiveness if they participated, at least not the first set of testifiers. The committee that they testified before was the *Human Rights Violations* hearings. What is implied by that name is that the testifiers would testify to their human rights being violated.

Let us return to the case of Khadijah. Khadijah can make a predictive inquiry, a check-in, and invitation to her two warring neighbors at their individual homes but also at a homeowners' meeting. The homeowners' meeting will consist of members of the community who are also vulnerables. This is not to say that two warring neighbors' forgiveness is the property of the homeowners. Rather, the neighbors' forgiveness will matter to the vulnerables. Likewise in the political case, a member of the church in Birmingham or a resident of the city can make the predictive inquiry or check-in to the victims⁴³ at a community meeting or in another appropriate public space. And after certain conditions have been met and making it with much care, a vulnerable can also extend an invitation to the victim to forgive. However, just like any invitation, the victim should feel under no obligation to respond to the invitation immediately.

Table 2. **Standing to make public forgiveness requests**

| PUBLIC SPHERE | Demands in the Blame Sense (certain conditions) | Demands in the Blame Sense (serious wrongdoing) | Demands in the command sense | Predictive Inquiry | Introspective Inquiry | Check-ins with evidence of prior forgiveness | Pleas as repetitive asking & begging | Pleas as invitation |
|-------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Offender | | | | | | | | |
| 3 rd party w/ link | | | | | | | | |
| Entrusted party | | | | | | | | |
| Vulnerable | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |

⁴³ Who are the victims to whom we request forgiveness will be addressed in the chapter 3.

Conclusion

Although I argue in this chapter that only vulnerables' public forgiveness requests are apt via a predictive inquiry, check-in, and invitation, I will show in chapter 4 that the requests are not apt in all public cases. When these inquiries are made in public spaces full of racial meaning they are not only inappropriate but they can block the aims of forgiveness. Before we explore that terrain, I will first look in greater depth at political forgiveness rhetoric by examining the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC case may sound similar to the cases I raise in chapter one. Also, their use of forgiveness rhetoric and the successful democratic transition of South Africa may at first convince us of the usefulness of forgiveness rhetoric more broadly and requests in particular. However, I will provide reasons for why this assumption is not without controversy.

CHAPTER 3

What Can We Learn About Forgiveness Requests from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Introduction

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is perhaps the most prominent, large-scale effort at engaging in political forgiveness in recent years (ever, perhaps). As such, it illustrates both what people tend to mean by forgiveness as a political project, and some of the main pitfalls of that project. The calls by white judges and journalists on black victims of violence in America to forgive their attackers differ in some important ways from the TRC. But do those differences affect what is basically good, or bad, in political forgiveness requests? That is: a) can the requests in the US achieve some of the same ends as the TRC (e.g., lowering the risk of vengeful violence; bringing citizens together in a reconciliatory project that may overcome important injustices) and b) do they have some of the same problems as the TRC (e.g., pressuring or manipulating victims into forgiving too soon or basing themselves on an implicitly Christian model of forgiveness?). If either a) or b) is true, then we can learn some things from the TRC despite the disanalogies. In this chapter, I will argue that the TRC shows us what can be good *and* also problematic about political forgiveness requests.⁴⁴ In doing so I claim that the TRC is, in

⁴⁴ There is disagreement over whether political forgiveness is possible. Griswold (2007) claims that if we define political forgiveness as interpersonal forgiveness in a political context then it is not possible. For Griswold, several features must be met in order for interpersonal forgiveness to occur. For example, forgiveness must be tied to sentiment, the pardoner must be the injured party, and the offender must be contrite. He claims that these features are not all met in the public sphere. Digeser (1998) agrees that the interpersonal forgiveness that Griswold describes cannot happen in a political context. However, Digeser thinks that pardoning, financial forgiveness, and justice can. Political forgiveness on Digeser's view is about giving up our right to compensation, punishment, or other moral

some respects, both a good and bad model of forgiveness requests. I follow Alice MacLachlan (2012) in defining political forgiveness as “forgiveness between individuals or groups whose primary relationship, or the relationship in question (i.e. that relationship implicated in the wrongdoing), is political — e.g. forgiveness for politically motivated or politically charged wrongdoings: hate crimes, for example ... forgiveness enacted as part of ... the ongoing process of making the conditions for political society possible (that is to say, a broader political effort to establish lasting peace, build democratic institutions)” (42). I conclude by suggesting that although we can learn from the TRC, forgiveness requests in the US context have distinctive features that prevent them from achieving similar political goals.

1. **The South African TRC**

1.1 **TRC Background**

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created in order to address political violence that occurred between 1960 and 1994 in the name of apartheid and anti-apartheid. The TRC Act of 1995 created the commission, noting that the goal of the Commission “shall be to promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of

demands. However, the agents that Digeser has in mind as forgivers are not individuals like black victims but rather the state or institutions acting on behalf of individuals. Unlike Griswold, MacLachlan (2012) thinks that we should not treat political forgiveness as being in contrast with interpersonal relationships. She thinks that we have to expand our notion of interpersonal relationships. We have interpersonal relationships with friends, but they are not the only examples of interpersonal relationships. We also have interpersonal relationships with our fellow citizens although they may differ from our relationships with our family and friends in affection and in how well we know one another. Interpersonal relationships with fellow citizens are a social association that also includes expectations such as rules of civility and civic responsibilities. Political forgiveness emerges from our political relationships.

understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past” (National Unity and Reconciliation Act, Section (3) (1).

The commission believed that in order to transition the nation to a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, reconciliation rather than vengeance would have to occur. The commission allowed for victims to tell their stories, for offenders to tell the truth about their violent acts, and for amnesty to be granted to offenders that told the truth. The Commission sought to achieve these goals through the creation of three committees: the Reparation and Rehabilitation (R&R) Committee, the Amnesty Committee (AC), and the Human Rights Violations (HRV) committee.

The R&R’s role was to provide support to victims via reparations and to provide recommendations on healing for survivors and their community. The Amnesty Committee, whose members were lawyers and judges, reviewed amnesty applications, and granted or refused amnesty. Instead of prosecuting all wrongdoers, the government decided on conditional amnesty. The TRC was the first truth commission that offered amnesty to wrongdoers. There were several reasons for this decision. First, trials are not a good vehicle for truth-telling. Trials are also quite expensive and South Africa did not have the institutional structure to accommodate them. The government also decided against trials because they believed that if leaders of the old government knew that prosecution was a possibility, there would not have been a smooth, peaceful government transition.⁴⁵ The amnesty hearings were conducted like judicial trials. The committee reviewed over 7,100 applications and evaluated them based on three legal criteria: that the applicants had (1) committed a political crime; (2) during 1960-1994; and (3) disclosed information about their

⁴⁵ There were other amnesty options decided against such as blanket amnesty and adjudicated amnesty behind closed doors – with or without restitution, etc.

crime. Criterion 3 was important because some victims did not know who was responsible for the wrongdoing and a lot of victims did not know what had happened to their loved ones nor did they know where their loved ones were buried. Disclosing this information revealed these details; details that often brought closure to the family and community and (as is discussed in the victim hearings transcripts) helped victims begin the process of forgiveness. Applicants were not required to show remorse during the amnesty hearings although a few of them did. Out of over 7,000 applications received, 2,328 applications received hearings and 568 applicants were granted amnesty. 70% of applications came from those who were already imprisoned (Wilson 2001, 23).

The responsibility of the HRV Committee was to determine who were victims and to investigate human rights violations. Local churches throughout South Africa were charged with identifying victims from their particular area, taking initial statements, and giving those statements to the committee so that they could choose who would testify at the public hearings. 22,000 South Africans submitted statements to the commission. Only 1,819 were selected to testify at the public hearings. The HRV Committee, unlike the Amnesty Committee, was made up of 17 commissioners, several of whom held positions at religious institutions. There were also commissioners who had public-interest backgrounds. The HRV Committee was chaired by Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu—a black South African native who was the Archbishop of Cape Town until 1996. Testifiers consisted, not only of black victims, but also of whites and coloreds and they held a range of different backgrounds and social positions in South Africa. According to the TRC database, 89.9% were African; 1.7% were Colored; 1.1% were white; and 0.2% were Asian (TRC Report 1998, 1/6: 164–173). 55.3% of the victims who testified were women while 44.7% were men. Victims were ordinary citizens, policemen, and members of political

groups. This is important to note because this contradicts the assumption that all victims were black South Africans and all perpetrators were whites. Apartheid was not the crime about which the victims testified. Victims also did not testify about any and all acts of wrongdoing. Rather, victims testified about ‘gross human rights violations’⁴⁶ committed by state police, political parties, and anti-apartheid groups.

The HRV committee held five to fifteen depositions a day. Each victim hearing was about an hour or less in length (Lehman-Langlois and Shearing 2004, 211). Usually the chair of the committee would open the hearing, introduce the witness, and a Committee member would lead the witness through their testimony.⁴⁷ After a sharing of the details, the following occurred:

Commissioners ritually asked four questions: 1) whether the TRC could do something to help the victim; 2) whether the victim would like to know the names of the perpetrators (when applicable – many victims knew fully well who the perpetrators were); 3) whether the victim was politically active at the time; 4) how the victim’s life had been transformed by the events (211).

The TRC Act set out the processes and structures in which truth telling in the victim hearings would take place but the details of how this would occur were left up to the Commissioners. They decided on “the construction of a narrative or discourse explaining how, when and at what cost truth might lead to reconciliation and national unity” (208). The Commissioners had to determine how truth would be told and what counted as truth. This was the least controversial part and perhaps the easiest task of the TRC. But the commissioners also had to determine what would be the link between truth-telling and reconciliation (208). Not surprisingly—given the religious makeup of the committee, its

⁴⁶ Gross violations included the planning or committing murders, abductions, torture, or severe ill-treatment.

⁴⁷ Committee members often possessed the victim’s original statement during the hearing.

chair, the Ubuntu philosophy, and the Christianity of the majority of South Africans—they concluded that it would be forgiveness.⁴⁸ This, however, proved to be the most difficult and the most controversial task. After decades of colonialism, inequality, and a reign of apartheid and the violence and terror that ensued as a result, South African leadership attempted through the TRC to find ways to move past this history and live together given this history. They also wanted to do it carefully. The discourse of forgiveness tried to help solve this political problem. Was this discourse the only alternative? Was there a better alternative than forgiveness discourse? Answering these questions depends on whether one thinks forgiveness is necessary for reconciliation. If one accepts forgiveness as the letting go of anger (as I will argue the TRC did), there are two possibilities: a) forgiveness with reconciliation and b) forgiveness without reconciliation. A person could let go of anger and avoid contact with others (an instance of a). A person could hold on to anger and yet peacefully co-exist with others (an instance of b). But even if one accepts b, it will be hard to deny that negative attitudes are an obstacle to good relations. The discourse of forgiveness was used as a way to help South Africans live together, not because forgiveness was the only path to reconciliation, but because reconciliation without forgiveness may have been less complete (Radzik and Murphy 2015).

1.2. ***Forgiveness Requests at the TRC Hearings***

The goal of reconciliation through forgiveness required a discourse of forgiveness in which forgiveness was requested, encouraged, and praised. Since this dissertation focuses

⁴⁸ Ubuntu is a distinctively African value that means “people are people through other people.” It means that people’s humanity is bound up in other’s humanity. Ubuntu emphasizes the priority of restorative justice and recognizes that vengeance and resentment can undermine harmony.

on requests for and about forgiveness (although I will talk about encouragement and praise as well in this chapter), I will first address in this section how forgiveness requests took shape during the victim and amnesty hearings.

Bishop Desmond Tutu in *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999) claims “most [amnesty] applicants have expressed remorse and asked for forgiveness from their victims” (48). However, a look through the amnesty hearings’ transcripts reveals that only a minority of perpetrators did in fact request forgiveness. Here are a few examples.

One perpetrator stated: “I ask Amy’s parents, Amy’s friends and relatives, I ask them to forgive me. Just to hear that they have forgiven me would mean a great deal to me, for me it would be starting a new life” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1997a). Another perpetrator stated: “I say we are sorry. I say the burden of the Bishop massacre will be on our shoulders for the rest of our lives. We cannot wish it away. It happened. But please, I ask specifically the victims not to forget, I cannot ask this, but to forgive us” (Tutu 1999, 150-151).

Members of the committee made forgiveness requests at the victim hearings. During the first six months of the hearings, each victim was asked by the committee at the end of their testimony whether they had forgiven the perpetrator (Wilson 2001, 174). In response, victims often resisted forgiveness.⁴⁹ Here are a few examples of forgiveness requests from the victim hearings.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ There is no recorded number of how many resisted forgiveness.

⁵⁰ You will note that the following examples are disproportionately represented by women whose husbands or sons were the direct victims. This is not to suggest that women were not direct victims or perpetrators of crimes. The following explains the worry around women and their testimonies. “No questions about rape and gender-based violence were asked and if a woman spoke about being raped or experiencing gender-based violence, the statement-taker usually did not record it. When a woman insisted that their rape or gender violence

Example 1: (Predictive Inquiry)

Remember that predictive inquiries are inquiries into what the victim will do in the future. The first two examples below are predictive inquiries in that they ask if the victim will forgive if certain conditions are met in the future.

Mrs. Papu's husband was killed by a rival political group.

REV XUNDU: Thank you Mr. Chairperson. Ma'am"? I heard your story. I only have one question. According to you what can be done so that there can be peace? Is there a conflict between yourself and this other group?

MRS. PAPU: What I want is for them to come forward to tell the truth.

REV XUNDU: You are saying that reconciliation can be built if they can come forward?

MRS. PAPU: Yes, if they can come and tell the truth.

REV. XUNDU: *If they can come forward you will forgive them?*

MRS. PAPU: Yes.

REV. XUNDU: Thank you.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1997b)

Example 2: (Predictive Inquiry)

be recorded in their statement, the statement-takers refused to record these incidents unless the woman had opened a case with the police... The TRC processes did not view women as actors in the violence, but only as victims, and no women were cited as perpetrators of human rights violations even where women political prisoners recited violations committed against them by female prison warders" (Khulumani Support Group South Africa, 2011). Recognizing this gap and through the work and advocacy of women, the TRC established three separate Special Hearings on Women beginning in August 1996.

Mrs. Whitfield's husband was killed by an Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) bombing in 1993.

MR. SANDI: I may be asking you the same question, but maybe in a different way. I don't seem to get your attitude too clear as to how you would relate to those who perpetrated this gross human rights violation. *Let us suppose the people who did this to your husband and other victims of the tragedy were to come to you and say to you they are asking for forgiveness, how would you respond to such a request?*

MRS. WHITFIELD: I've got no grudge against anybody; I feel if I have then I cannot call myself a child of God, because if God forgives us, we can forgive others ... Here on earth there is no justice. I've never seen justice in this world, but when he comes face to face with the Lord, that is the day he is going to get judged and that is my only hope.

MR. SANDI: Thank you very much.

MRS. WHITFIELD: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1997c).

Example 3: (Invitations)

Remember that invitations are polite invitations to forgive. The following is an example of an invitation in that it asks or invites the victim to forgive or have forgiveness in their heart.

MS. TSOBILEYO: The comrades and I met with other comrades from KTC, Nyanga East and Crossroads. We marched to [indistinct] to complain about the forced removals.

ADV. NTSEBEZA: Now when you say the police shot you, was there anybody who told you that what you were doing is illegal?

MS. TSOBILEYO: Nobody gave us any notice.

ADV. NTSEBEZA: The police just saw a crowd of people and they shot?

MS. TSOBILEYO: Yes. I have several bullets in my body, some are still in my vagina.

CHAIRPERSON: Any other, thank you very much my sister, *please have forgiveness in you*. We hope that you will be healed spiritually and physically thank you.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1986)

2. **Benefits of TRC's Forgiveness Discourse**

One of the most popular accounts of the benefits of forgiveness comes from Bishop Tutu in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*. However, Tutu also implicitly provides two benefits of the TRC forgiveness requests. The first benefit was that requests served as a direct and explicit means towards reconciliation. Instead of going on as if everything was OK, telling the truth, giving an apology (Tutu 1999, 271),⁵¹ and asking for forgiveness was, for Tutu, a way of “staring truth in the face” and “work[ing] out why they fell out in the first place.”⁵² That is to say, the forgiveness question made explicit what the participants were getting at. It was an important question for those who refused to engage in language and action that only strove for peace in appearance. By asking for forgiveness, one could not gloss over what occurred or what was needed to achieve reconciliation.

The second benefit of forgiveness requests according to Tutu is that they showed the value of forgiveness. Tutu notes that asking forgiveness and getting a negative response, for example, demonstrated “that forgiveness could not be taken for granted; it was neither cheap nor easy” (271). The request and its refusal showed that forgiveness took work. Are there other benefits to the forgiveness requests? In what follows I argue that the forgiveness requests also empowered victims and opened up the possibility of forgiveness.

⁵¹ Apologies from the amnesty hearings were rare. Chapman (2007) points out “perpetrators were reluctant to acknowledge their wrongdoing or to offer meaningful apologies, expressions of regret, or some form of compensation to those who had suffered.”

⁵² It should be noted that apologies are requests for forgiveness by perpetrators were rare. Only a few apologized during the amnesty hearings.

2.1. **Empowerment**

Victims do not have a choice about being violated. The very act of victimization robs them of autonomy (Kohen 2009, 404). A request for forgiveness can allow victims to reassert their power publicly. Being placed in the role of decision maker can be empowering. By ‘empowering’ I mean enabling victims to exercise autonomy” (404). Martha Minow (1998) and Ari Kohen (2009) think that choosing to forgive can be empowering. Minow thinks that the choice to forgive empowers victims in that it allows them to be different from the people who attacked them. Kohen thinks it empowers victims to begin to heal. While I do not deny that the forgiveness requests in the TRC did in fact provide this kind of empowerment, I do not think the empowering action was only in the *type* of choice but in the act of *choosing*. Victims were empowered in their choice to forgive *and* not to forgive. One of the benefits of the TRC forgiveness requests is that they gave victims the opportunity to exert their autonomy on a public stage.⁵³ Victims were given a public space to make or declare their decision and that choosing was an empowering act. If a society is to heal and continue to coexist after violence, it is not enough that victim and offender coexist but that victims regain a sense of personal and civic power over their own lives. A benefit of the TRC forgiveness requests is that they provided that empowering opportunity.

⁵³ My focus here is not necessarily on the benefits (healing) or disadvantages (e.g. public shame in their answer) but on what the choosing was able to do. Also, these are only two examples of the ways in which victims could have asserted their autonomy. Other options might have included having a say in the prosecution of perpetrators. This varied. Some did have a say, particularly, in the case of former South African Police colonel, Eugene de Kock, for example. Since amnesty was on the table, and not retribution, the extent of this was limited.

2.2. **Opening up the Possibility of Forgiveness**

One might think that a feature of the forgiveness requests is that they themselves made forgiveness possible. The assumption behind this idea is that victims would not have forgiven without the committee encouraging it or asking for it. I reject this. For example, some victims were Christian and the Christian scriptures encourage forgiveness. Some of these victims may have felt compelled by religious convictions and did not need the committee to encourage them to forgive. There is no doubt that the committee was successful in spreading the message that forgiveness was important for a new South Africa. However, I do not think the forgiveness rhetoric is what made forgiveness possible for the victims as if victims would never have forgiven without the committee asking for it. On the other hand, I think forgiveness requests were made in a context that made forgiveness more possible for victims regardless of whether victims thought about forgiveness before or during the committee's work. These requests opened up the possibility for forgiveness because they were made within a context of truth (facts about the atrocities) and acknowledgement (recognition of those facts) by the committee. Truth and acknowledgment provided moral conditions for forgiveness.

As I mention in chapter 2, when certain conditions are met they can provide moral reasons for victims to forgive. What conditions are necessary will depend on what the particular victim requires. However, I do think that there is a minimal level of conditions that may apply to a majority of cases, all things considered. These conditions, for example, include apologies or reparations when applicable. Asking that victims forgive without considering if these conditions have been met can be inappropriate. But the requests are not only inappropriate; I think they can be impractical. If conditions are met, there is a

greater chance that victims will respond affirmatively to the requests. In other words, meeting certain conditions can open up the possibility that victims forgive.

Sindiswa Mkhonto, a black South African in an interview with the *Cape Times* in 1996, noted “I want the TRC to search for truth. You cannot forgive something you don't know” (Friedman 1996). Mkhonto recognized that in order to forgive, an agent must have something and someone to forgive. This can only occur by getting at the truth. This truth is a necessary condition for forgiveness. The human rights violations hearings in which the requests were made were not just a space where victims were asked to forgive. The goal of the hearings was to get at the truth. The forgiveness requests took place after the victims gave their testimony. More importantly, the same committee that was making the requests was also investigating human rights violations. The committee was also part of a commission whose task was to uncover crimes through confessions made at the concurrent amnesty hearings. The committee was showing good faith that they were getting at the truth. While the requests did not in themselves provide truth, they were made in a context of providing or finding the truth. Note that after confessions from offenders, some offenders requested forgiveness—although not all (Friedman 1996). The committee worked not only to ask for forgiveness but worked to find something that victims could forgive. By doing so, the committee not only made forgiveness requests but if truth is important for forgiveness, the committee also opened up the possibility that victims could forgive through this work.

The possibility of forgiveness was also available because of the acknowledgment the requesters gave to victims. This acknowledgment was a recognition of the crime they fell victim to and of the pain and loss they now experienced. The committee now acknowledged those who were once silenced as their testimonies were listened to and made part of public record. The committee also acknowledged victims' pain and showed compassion and

empathy. Bishop Tutu often showed compassion to victims by weeping with them. When painful moments occurred such as the wailing cry of Nomonde Calata, whose husband was one of the Cradock Four (anti-apartheid activists who were killed at a roadblock by police officers), the committee would lead the audience in a moment of silence or a freedom song.

In a study conducted by Judy Eaton, C. Ward Struthers, and Alexander Santelli, they found that acknowledgement of transgressions by third parties has a positive effect on forgiveness (Eaton et. al. 2006, 1400). This is because when third parties say to victims “I understand this happened to you. I cannot imagine how this makes you feel. I understand why you feel the way you do,” it makes victims feel perceptually validated. Perceptual validation is when one feels correct about one’s interpretation of events. Eaton et al. argue that acknowledgment makes victims feel perceptual validation and this can increase the *possibilities for forgiveness*, although forgiveness is not guaranteed. This is because the validation vindicates victims. They also argue that acknowledgment by the TRC gave victims perceptual validation and this opened up possibilities for forgiveness. They conclude:

Our findings suggest that what the TRC did for the Black South African people as a group was to recognize and affirm their pain and suffering and provide them with perceptual validation, or confirmation, of what had happened. This opportunity to have made public what they knew to be true was perhaps more effective at helping them forgive.... Based on the findings of our research, we propose that the TRC helped to collectively validate the direct and indirect victims of apartheid, thus enabling them to, if not forgive the perpetrators, at least move on with their lives and reduce their revenge motivations toward them (1400).

The TRC did not just make requests for forgiveness. They placed their requests within a space of acknowledgment. Acknowledgement was a moral condition that made it possible for victims to respond affirmatively to the requests. This does not mean the response was always affirmative in that moment. While acknowledgment for the committee was an

“affirmation that a person’s pain is real and worthy of attention ... thus central to the restoration of the dignity of victims” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998), requests made in a context of acknowledgment also created the moral conditions for victims to consider forgiveness also in the future.

The TRC shows some of the benefits of political forgiveness requests. It is an example that forgiveness requests can empower victims and open up the possibility for forgiveness. The example of the TRC shows us that forgiveness requests can make explicit what needs to be done to achieve reconciliation, show the value of forgiveness, empower victims, and provide possibilities for forgiveness. However, these benefits are achieved when requesters desire actual peace, take the risks of hearing various responses, dedicate themselves to seeking truth, and acknowledge victims.

3. **Pitfalls of the TRC’s Forgiveness Discourse**

Although there are benefits to the TRC forgiveness requests, the requests and forgiveness rhetoric in general are not without controversy. Although there are a few examples of commissioners making forgiveness requests in the examples above, criticisms of forgiveness in the TRC by journalists, post-conflict scholars, and philosophers do not focus on the moral or political impermissibility of these requests or their implications in particular. The focus has been on the forgiveness discourse in general.⁵⁴ For example, 1)

⁵⁴ Wilson (2001) claims that the TRC religious narrative put illiberal pressure on victims to forgive. Using the TRC as a primary example, Minow (2015) claims that promoting forgiveness may jeopardize the rule of law. Verdoolaege (2008) takes a careful look at the discourse used during the HRV hearings. She points out how some members of the committee put words into the mouths of testifiers; how the committee used the testifiers original commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation as a way to make it difficult for testifiers to retract; and she points to the difference in treatment of what she refers to as

Bishop Tutu's beginning and ending statements emphasized the need for forgiveness; 2) victims were often praised for their willingness to forgive and ignored when they did not; and 3) the account of forgiveness was exclusively Christian. The philosophical criticisms that I will discuss in this section about the forgiveness discourse of the TRC revolve around 1-3 and not around requests specifically. I will develop versions of these criticisms in what follows.

I do not deny that the TRC used the forgiveness discourse because it appealed to so many and they thought it was a way to solve the political problem of repairing and rebuilding the state. However, I will argue that the problems above show that the TRC's account of forgiveness (a politicized Christian account) was limited and inappropriate.

3.1 **The False Dichotomy Criticism**

One problem with the TRC's forgiveness rhetoric is what I refer to as the 'false dichotomy' problem. A false dichotomy occurs when two options are presented as the only options when in fact there are other options available.

In the case of the TRC, the alternatives that were presented to victims were a "willingness to forgive" or a "willingness to wreak vengeance" (Brudholm 2008). The idea behind this dichotomy is that forgiveness is the alternative to revenge. It is understandable why TRC commissioners would embrace this view and present these two options. During apartheid and before the elections, vengeful violence was rampant in the country. In order

"ideal testifiers" and "non-ideal testifiers". Elizabeth Kiss (2000) is also concerned with how the TRC treated victims who dissented from forgiveness and reconciliation. It must be noted that most of the literature that supports or criticizes the TRC has focused on amnesty and justice and not forgiveness discourse. See Allais (2011), Allen (2001), Villa-Vicencio (2000), and Bennett (2003).

for a new South Africa to come into existence, vengeful violence had to come to an end. The way to bring this about was through forgiveness—for no matter what one's account of forgiveness is, it is reasonable to think that if one has forgiven, one will no longer have a desire for or participate in revenge.

Although this argument is sound, there is a problem with the dichotomy it presupposes, between anger and forgiveness. Critics of this false dichotomy like Thomas Brudholm focus on the presumed exclusiveness of the two options of “willingness to forgive” or “willingness to wreak vengeance”. In response to the “wreak revenge” option, critics have claimed that this choice does not fully capture the position of all victims. Some victims were not interested in the TRC's account of forgiveness or in wreaking vengeance. Not only were they not interested in these options but also there were more reasonable options on the table. How do we make sense of how they feel, what they want, and what they can do as citizens to achieve reconciliation? (29). Some victims did not seek revenge but rather wanted legal prosecution and punishment. To view a desire for prosecution as ‘revenge’ wrongly conflates the two; wanting justice and wanting revenge is not the same thing. Another concern about the “wreak vengeance” option is that it depicts punishment as being of one form—retributive. However, punishment can be rehabilitative, restorative, or it can focus on deterrence. The false dichotomy depicts punishment in the retributive sense only, making anyone who desires justice or help from the courts appear vengeful when they are not (29).

Another criticism of the dichotomy is that it depicts anger only in its excessive form. The desire for revenge is rooted in vindictive rage and any expression of anger is viewed only as vindictive. Here the critic thinks the connection between the two options is false and therefore argues that commissioners are wrong in thinking that an unwillingness to

give up all kinds of anger (this unwillingness equals unforgiveness) *amounts to* a willingness to wreak vengeance instead. While I do not think anger is conceptually about payback, a person who is angry may have a disposition to strike back or may gain satisfaction from the suffering of others. For this reason, there is a general worry about what people will do when they are angry. I am sympathetic to the commission's concern about anger. However, I think the problem is not with anger but with a particular kind of anger.

I agree with critics of the false dichotomy that not all types of anger lead to vengeance. The commission failed in not distinguishing these different forms from each other during the hearings. The commission only employed an account of vindictive rage. For example, in the final report of the TRC Bishop Tutu says, “I am exhilarated by the magnanimity of those who should by rights be consumed by bitterness and a lust for revenge; who instead have time after time shown an astonishing magnanimity: a willingness to forgive.”⁵⁵ Anger is conflated with bitterness and a lust for revenge. Those who have forgiven, on Tutu’s view, give up bitterness and revenge and since these are features of anger, the victim gives up anger in an effort to forgive. There is no attention given to righteous indignation or moderate and appropriate moral anger as a rational and moral response to wrongdoing or other forgiveness practices. As a result, vindictive rage that desires revenge is the only alternative to vengeance. However, I do not think vindictive rage is the only form of anger that victims feel. As I point out in chapter 1, there are appropriate forms of anger without any desire for revenge. As long as the account of forgiveness involves giving up all types of anger, the dichotomy of ‘forgive or wreak vengeance’ will be false; for it is possible to have righteous indignation and not want to “wreak vengeance.”

⁵⁵ TRC Final Report 1998, vol. I, ch. 1, para 71.

Given that the false dichotomy only presents these two alternatives—which actually is “give up all anger” or “wreak vengeance,” Brudholm (2008) argues that this can push people to forgive who are not ready to forgive. If we consider the TRC’s account of forgiveness as the “giving up of all anger” as the only alternative to vengeance but the victim does not want to seek revenge, the victim may decide to forgive as the only other choice—even if they are not ready to forgive. Expounding on this point, Margaret Walker claims:

If the possibilities of addressing conflict are represented as “vengeance or forgiveness,” victims may feel, or may actually be, pressed to take an undemanding, or even a forgiving stance, even where this frustrates their needs for vindication or forecloses any of the varieties of vindication that might satisfy their needs to have their dignity restored, their suffering acknowledged, or their losses compensated (Walker 2006, 99).

While I do not think that victims can just give up their emotions at will, and therefore can also do what they are not yet ready to do in this case, I think they can feel compelled at least to try to do so. Thus, I think a more refined version of the criticism could be reframed as: the two options can push victims to feel compelled to do what they are not ready to do. But this creates an additional problem. If the victims are not able to do as the TRC suggest nor are they willing to wreak revenge, then it remains an open question what options they really have in a project of national reconciliation.

Criticisms of the false dichotomy can be summarized as the following:

- A. There are other options than “Option A (*willingness to give up all anger*) or Option B (*willingness to wreak vengeance*).”
- B. Refusal of Option A doesn’t always result in option B because there are different kinds of anger.
- C. Option B will lead agents to *feel compelled* to adopt Option A when they are not ready.

A reader may be tempted to think we can escape the three worries by refusing to present citizens with just two choices. But I think the problem with the false dichotomy is that it doesn't take into consideration that there are other options to the ones in the dichotomy. A victim could also choose “willingness to reconcile” or “willingness not to reconcile” for example. This too presents two choices but it is *not* a false dichotomy for within these two options are a variety of choices. Thus, it is also not restrictive like the false dichotomy. For example, in the false dichotomy one has the choice to give up anger. This is the only practice that counts as forgiveness. However, the “willingness to reconcile” option allows for a practice-based view of forgiveness to also frame the discussion.⁵⁶ In other words, “willingness to reconcile” makes room for a variety of moral practices that the practice-based view of forgiveness allows. This is because such a view leaves it up to citizens to decide the moral practices (i.e. refuse revenge, let go of hatred, etc.) that would lead them to reconcile (if they choose) instead of restricting them to forgiveness based only on the “get rid of all anger” account.

3.2 **The Pressure for Forgiveness Problem**

The TRC's goal was reconciliation and the Committee believed forgiveness was the path towards reconciliation. Given this focus, they “sought stories of forgiveness because of widespread assumptions that forgiveness would build a new nation from a divided society” (Stauffer 2015, 122). The emphasis in the hearings was “the validation of the individual subjective experience of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless” (TRC Report 1998, 111). One commissioner told a victim: “Now, please be free. This is not a

⁵⁶ It will also allow a victim to forgive or not forgive but yet still reconcile (recall options a and b in section 1.1) even if the reconciliation is less complete as a result.

court of law; it's just a place where you want to come and ventilate your truth” (Verdoolaege 2006, 67). However, this did not stop the commission from praising certain forgiving voices and dismissing or ignoring those who refused. I will argue that ignoring and marginalizing testifiers who refused to forgive and praising ideal-testifiers was a ‘subtle coercive practice’ that created an inappropriate pressure for victims to forgive and it had the effect of inhibiting forgiveness instead of encouraging it.

Richard Wilson (2001), in a book based on his extended anthropological fieldwork on the impact of the TRC in African communities in Johannesburg, claims that while forgiveness was acceptable in the hearings, anything that departed from it was unacceptable. He notes:

The hearings were structured in such a way that any expression of a desire for revenge by victims would seem out of place. Virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation were so loudly and roundly applauded that emotions of vengeance, hatred and bitterness were rendered unacceptable, an ugly intrusion on a peaceful, healing process (120).

During an amnesty hearing an attorney began by saying, “It is time for healing. It is time for forgiveness. It is time for truth. It is time for confession.” When the relatives of the victims resisted amnesty and refused to forgive, the commissioner assumed the victims were ignorant of the TRC and its goal by asking, “Do you read newspapers and watch TV, not so?”, “I assume that you know about this Truth and Reconciliation commission?” and “Do you believe in reconciliation?” (Brudholm 2008, 30-31). The implication was that because they refused to forgive they were ignorant of what was happening and their refusal meant they were not on board with the nation’s goal of reconciliation.

When forgiveness was resisted by what Verdoolaege calls “non-ideal testifiers,” the testifiers were not only assumed to be ignorant but they were also dismissed. Below is an example:

MR. BUTHELEZI: I suffered a lot. I almost was affected mentally. Even today, I think somehow I am affected mentally. So, I am not going to, I am not going to reconcile, I am not about to.

MRS. SEROKE: Order please, order.

CHAIRPERSON: Buthelezi, could you, I think you have come to the end, could you please take questions. Thank you.

MR. BUTHELEZI: No, no, no. No, I have no peace whatsoever and *I will not forgive*. I do not even see why the TRC is existing and how it is helping us in a way...

CHAIRPERSON: Mr. Buthelezi.

(Verdoolaege 2008, 148).

The responses of non-ideal testifiers, like Mr. Buthelezi, may not have supported the forgiveness narrative the TRC wanted to promote. However, failing to give non-ideal testifiers the same respect as ideal testifiers does not aid in reconciliation. When the committee does not respect non-ideal testifiers in this way, it blocks reconciliation rather than aiding it. In his work on the relationship between forgiveness and political reconciliation in post-conflict societies, Blustein (2014) addresses this worry. He writes:

According to a restorative conception of transitional justice ... the needs of the victims, including moral and emotional needs, have primary importance. However, a conception of political reconciliation that invalidates displays of negative emotions by victims, or effectively ignores or marginalizes the emotional readiness of victims to forgive or their feelings of mistrust and insecurity, can hardly be said to make the satisfaction of their moral and emotional needs a centerpiece of its reconciliation program (54).

Ignoring or marginalizing non-ideal testifiers only creates mistrust and not reconciliation because it puts the state’s needs over the moral and emotional needs of the individuals. In

the above passage, Blustein points to the ways in which the state can encourage individuals to forgive, not for their own healing, but only for the state's aims and goals. As a result, a state may rush its citizens to forgive. A state's willingness to rebuild may come faster than its citizens' willingness to forgive. A danger can occur when this happens. Victims may feel that their pain is not being acknowledged and this may create new resentments. This lack of recognition or denial of victims' entitlement to be angry "undermines rather than restore[s] the dignity and self-respect of victims" (166). The state may also put citizens' pain and emotions second to the nation's rebuilding. The state does not secure justice for the victims when it shows that their needs do not have primary importance. This also affects trust and respect between victims and the state. A society that "devalues the former or subordinates affirmation of their emotional responses to 'loftier' social aims risks the erosion of standards of mutual respect and trust as guiding aims of political reconciliation" (165).

While those who resisted forgiveness were presumed ignorant or were dismissed, those who did articulate forgiveness were praised. This is not to say that forgiveness was not praiseworthy. But refusals to forgive could result in dishonor or place a mark on an individual's public image. I will argue that this praise and shame model contributed to victims feeling that the committee was inappropriately pressuring them to forgive. A woman named Kalu admitted the following:

What really makes me angry about the TRC and Tutu is that they are putting pressure on me to forgive ... I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive. I carry this ball of anger within me and I don't know where to begin dealing with it. The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even angrier is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness (Stauffer 2015, 121).

In one study, 30% of participants in the TRC felt they were expected or forced to forgive. (Chapman 2008).

Philosophers of forgiveness have criticized the state coercing forgiveness. Griswold thinks that when forgiveness is politicized, political entities could coerce victims to forgive, thereby making forgiveness expected and demanded. He thinks this reduces forgiveness to a “theatrical gesture on the political stage” (Griswold 2007, 181). MacLachlan similarly thinks the danger of political forgiveness is that it can be coercive. If forgiveness is to be something that the victim chooses, then promoting forgiveness in a manipulative way takes away their agency.⁵⁷ This is “what people find disquieting, even distasteful, about political applications of forgiveness”:

Such a situation offends against the elective character of forgiveness, the particularistic nature of the reasons we have to forgive or not forgive, and also, belies the respect we rightly assume is due to those who have suffered wrongful injury. Victims’ forgiveness should not be politically mandated (MacLachlan 2012, 45).

But MacLachlan also goes further than Griswold. She thinks that any attempt to demand that victims forgive is illiberal. We cannot compel or legislate the heart. MacLachlan warns, “public policies and statements of political forgiveness must remain sensitive to the conditions of other members of the offended social or political group; political forgiveness can happen too soon or too late, and risk further conflict and casualties as a result” (Ibid, 50-51).

⁵⁷ This is not to say that all public promotion of forgiveness is necessarily manipulative. However, I do think that public promotion of forgiveness risks being manipulative. This is because the state wields more power than the individual. The power alone may lead individuals to forgive even when they do not want to because they may be afraid of what might happen to them if they do not forgive or they may consider their forgiveness apt only because it is the powerful that is encouraging it. The state may want to achieve reconciliation quickly, more quickly than the individual is able to do. In order to get them on the timetable of the state, the state may rush individuals into forgiving. The state may also think that what’s at stake in forgiveness is civic peace. Given that this is a high stake goal and a goal in which the citizen is part of, the state may make the individual feel that they will stand in the way of achieving this national goal if they do not forgive.

But did the TRC coerce victims to forgive? I do not think it explicitly did. However, I agree with the criticism that the TRC used ‘subtle pressure’. “Subtle and covert pressure” is “what is not demanded directly but is clearly expected and ways of speaking and examples that are provided or ignored or forgotten” (Brudholm 2008, 41). While the TRC did not explicitly coerce victims into forgiving, expecting certain responses and ignoring or shaming others are examples of subtle and covert pressure. This is not to say that moral criticism is coercive. You can think that I have a duty but I am not living up to it and therefore it garners disapproval from you. You have not wronged me in anyway in pointing this out. However, you can be wrong about what duties I have. You can also react in ways that are inappropriate when I fail to live up to them. In the case of the TRC, I think what brought about ‘inapt pressure’ to forgive is that citizens felt that the TRC was wrong about what duties citizens actually had. Perhaps victims were convinced that reconciliation was a political duty but the particular route (TRC’s account of forgiveness) was not. Or they thought it was not a duty at all or that the political duty fell on transgressors to repent. Also, I think what brought about ‘inapt pressure’ to forgive is that citizens felt that the TRC was responding inappropriately (i.e. responding in insensitive or dismissive ways) to their and other victim’s refusals to forgive.

3.3 **The Exclusively Christian View Problem**

The TRC’s rhetoric of forgiveness was very much rooted in the Christian tradition and the HRV commissioners unapologetically expressed this connection. As a result, some critics suggest that the TRC’s account of forgiveness was too narrow and exclusive; based on an inaccurate reading of Christian scriptures; and the commissioners’ use of Jesus as an exemplar of unconditional forgiveness set a very high and unfair standard for ordinary

victims of human rights violations. I will argue that while this may be true, what is at issue in the exclusively Christian view problem is the inappropriateness of a reliance on a Christian account of forgiveness in a pluralist society.

The HRV hearings had a strong religious tone. During the hearings, candles were lit, Bishop Tutu wore religious garments, and sessions began and ended in prayer. Tutu not only prayed to the “God of Justice” but also often prayed in “Jesus’s Name.” Although the majority of South Africans are Christian, not all victims were Christian. A Muslim victim reported “on the day of my testimony ... I spoke critically to an all-Christian panel, headed by an archbishop sitting under a huge crucifix in a church hall” (Mayo 2015, 122). Victims of apartheid and anti-apartheid violence were also Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, etc. Given the Christian tone of the hearings, it is not surprising that a Christian version of forgiveness was promoted in the hearings. However, because not all victims were Christian, the TRC was not sensitive to these religious differences and failed to articulate an ecumenical or secular account of forgiveness. An ecumenical account of forgiveness would be non-dogmatic about any particular religious view of forgiveness and would include accounts of forgiveness from different religious traditions. A secular account of forgiveness would not rely on any religious account of forgiveness.

However, there was no room for any other conceptions of forgiveness but Tutu’s. Even so, in a pluralist society it is inappropriate for state actors to invoke an exclusively Christian account of forgiveness. This is because it shows disrespect to other religious traditions; by prioritizing one it can force these citizens to accept accounts that are not in line with their own religious beliefs. It can also isolate non-religious citizens. Marginalizing them in a political setting like this implies that they are not equal citizens and that citizenship in the new South Africa is linked to religion. A secular account of forgiveness is

more fitting because it does not require particular religious beliefs and commitments and it is an account that can invite all citizens to participate regardless of their religious beliefs.

While critics like Wilson think that Tutu's definition of forgiveness was too narrow and too Christian (Wilson 2001, 120). Mayo thinks the problem is not only that the TRC promoted a Christian account of forgiveness but also that Tutu's version of forgiveness was not biblical. While I think this is a relevant hermeneutical point, I do not think it is a relevant political point. On Mayo's view, the TRC's rhetoric of forgiveness was a 'corrupted account of biblical forgiveness' (156). Tutu advocated unconditional, unilateral forgiveness and he used the scriptures—specifically the seventy-times-seven passage, (Matthew 18:22) the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13) and Jesus' cry on the cross (Luke 23:34)—as support. In the seventy-times-seven passage, Jesus instructs his disciples to forgive their offender 490 times. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus instructs those when they pray to say "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The thought is that asking God's forgiveness is based on our willingness to extend forgiveness to others. Jesus also cried—on the cross on behalf of his executioners—that God "forgive them for they know not what they do." However, on Mayo's reading, neither in any of these texts nor the Christian Bible do we find support for unconditional forgiveness. I think Mayo's criticism fails to address an important concern here. Even if Tutu's account was an accurate account of Christian forgiveness, it would still be an inappropriate account to use in a pluralist society.⁵⁸ It was

⁵⁸ The creation of the commission was very much pluralist. For example, there were secular and religious leaders involved. There was an interfaith service that opened up the commission where interfaith leaders participated. The reconciliation process was very much religious. Banchoff (2008) notes that, "local ... actors thus drew on numerous local and religious norms and traditions. ... The combined power of religiosity and local religious norms is evident in the combination of the African *ubuntu* tradition with a Christian and (interfaith) dimension in the reconciliation process" (176). However, when it came to

inappropriate in a secular context because it excluded certain victims from participating. For if forgiveness is what it means to be Christian, then what does it mean to forgive if you are not Christian?

While I think the committee may have used Christianity to relate to Christian victims in order to get them to accept and extend Tutu's account of forgiveness, they also used forgiveness in ways that excluded others. The promotion of Christian forgiveness in the TRC presupposes an agreement on a single comprehensive religious doctrine (to use Rawls's terms). However, in a liberal political society, there is what Rawls calls 'reasonable pluralism' which is a diversity of thought, values, and ideas. This diversity is a permanent feature of democratic societies.⁵⁹ Promoting a particular religious view is in direct opposition to the goal of the liberal project. We must justify conceptions in terms that every reasonable person can understand and accept and do it not just in terms that only those from a particular religion can accept. Without this we will end up having conceptions that are promoted by power (those who have the power to promote the idea) and not by reason. To promote Christian forgiveness, as the HRV committee did, is illiberal for these reasons. I am not suggesting that it was unreasonable to encourage victims to forgive. The TRC was asking for concrete action so that citizens would not wreak vengeance. This was perfectly reasonable. However, what was unreasonable was requesting all citizens to extend politicized Christian forgiveness.

Another problem with the exclusive Christian view of forgiveness is its use of Jesus as an exemplar. During the TRC, Tutu uses Jesus as an exemplar of unconditional

forgiveness, forgiveness was not only a Christian concept but the account of forgiveness was very much Christian.

⁵⁹ See Rawls (1993).

forgiveness. Tutu claims that Jesus was ready to forgive before wrongdoers asked for it. Therefore, he considers those who extend unilateral forgiveness to be Christ-like. Like Mayo, I am concerned about the high standards this sets for ordinary victims. Brudholm and Gron also share this worry when they write, “The question is whether victims of gross injustices should be held to the example of the crucified Christ. After all, there are a number of salient moral and ontological differences between the situation of Christ and that of the human survivor of genocidal violence” (Mayo 2015, 132). Mayo continues, “issuing a prayer of forgiveness at the moment of death does not have the same implications as forgiving one’s rapist or torturer who may then go on to occupy the same neighborhood and enjoy the same freedoms as the victim” (132). In summary, the comparison of Jesus with those who forgave unconditionally sets a very high standard of morally that also does not consider the on-the-ground difficulties and challenges that victims actually face such as living among perpetrators of genocidal violence.

But I also think that using Jesus as an exemplar can be ineffective for those who do not hold a religious belief in Jesus. It may not have universal utility for people of other faiths. It can also be a divisive exemplar to use in a pluralist society. One may ask why wasn't Muhammad or Buddha used. More importantly, I do not think that religious exemplars—particularly divine ones—have a place in political discourse and in secular and

political projects of reconciliation.⁶⁰ It is more appropriate to use secular exemplars than religious ones if exemplars are to be used at all.⁶¹

3.4 ***Pitfalls and their Commonality***

Although commissioners and perpetrators made forgiveness requests in the amnesty and victim hearings, they were rare. Most of the criticisms of the TRC's forgiveness rhetoric are directed at the statements made by the committee, the praising of victims' forgiveness and ignoring or dismissing their refusals, and the promotion of an exclusive Christian view. However, I have shown that forgiveness requests also had problematic features. I have argued in this chapter that the South African TRC's rhetoric of forgiveness, although inspiring, can be criticized for creating a false dichotomy of 'giving up anger or vengeance'; pressuring people to forgive; and promoting an exclusive Christian account of forgiveness. The criticisms all show pitfalls of the TRC's account of forgiveness.

The committee's account of forgiveness was an exclusively Christian account that also meant accepting amnesty and forgiving unconditionally. It viewed forgiveness as only entailing one practice: the giving up of anger. It also viewed anger as only excessive and this giving up of anger was considered the only alternative to revenge.

⁶⁰ One might think that I am arguing that exemplars like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Gandhi should not be used and therefore my suggestion sounds unreasonable. However, on my view, King and Gandhi were not religious exemplars. They were religious individuals who were exemplars for the world. A religious exemplar on my view will consist of religious founders and divine beings for example. Religious exemplars are models for their religious followers. They rely on doctrinal and theological ideas to guide those who accept their doctrine, on their religious journey. Exemplars for the world are models for anyone regardless of religious affiliation. They often rely on universal concepts in order to guide people on their journey with members of society.

⁶¹ See Cherry (2017).

However, I believe that if the TRC adopted a practice-based view of political forgiveness, they would have escaped the above criticisms. The false dichotomy would not have existed because the options would not have been “give up anger” or “wreak vengeance” but rather “reconcile” or “not reconcile.” It also would have offered victims a wider range of ways to respond to the perpetrator. “Giving up anger” as *the* moral response is too narrow. The practice-based account, with its variety of moral practices, offers a variety of ways for victims to respond to offenders. Because the practice-based account is not a religious one, the account would have remained neutral on religious questions. Moral practices are not, by definition, religious ones. For example, moral practices do not require prayer or religious confession but could entail moderating anger or refusing vengeance. The aims of the practice based account are also not religious aims. They include moral repair and not salvation. Victims from other religious traditions would not have felt excluded from the process. And victims would not have felt an inapt pressure to forgive. Lastly, if the TRC adopted a practice-based view of political forgiveness, the pressure to forgive would have decreased in other ways. It seems that the praising and dismissing of victims acknowledgments to forgive or not in the hearings, were informed by an oversimplification of forgiveness and repair (i.e., forgiveness occurs when a victim says “I forgive” and reconciliation immediately occurs thereafter). The practice-based account gets past the syllogistic approach to moral repair of request/forgiveness/conclusion. It instead views forgiveness as emergent—it develops over time as all practices do (Carse and Tirrell 2010; MacLachlan 2009).

The TRC is an example of the benefits of forgiveness requests but also the pitfalls of political forgiveness requests. It is an example that forgiveness requests can also

inappropriately pressure victims to forgive, exclude certain victims, and provide limited options for victims.

Conclusion

As I have argued above, the TRC is both a good and bad model of forgiveness requests. While the TRC allows us to see the benefits and pitfalls of political forgiveness requests, the events and rhetoric of the TRC differs from forgiveness requests in US cases of anti-black racism, police brutality, and state violence in three ways.

First, what makes the cases I am interested in different from the TRC is that there are no political bodies encouraging or promoting forgiveness. The victims in my cases of interest are not officially part of a larger state project of racial reconciliation. Also, what is an issue in the TRC is how can the society survive. This is not what is at issue presently in the United States. So what you ask of citizens and the requirements they may have in these different contexts are quite different from each other. Therefore, the TRC is not a good case from which to generalize political forgiveness.

Second, critics do not consider race in any of the above TRC criticisms. This does not mean that race played no part in encouraging forgiveness. Remember that 89.9% of those who testified were black South Africans. Although apartheid was not the crime for which people testified, it was the context. My point here is that the criticisms I survey above are not worries about the impact of race on the hearings although it is worthy of our investigation, an investigation I take up in part in the next chapter. I do consider this as a limitation of the criticisms. The lack of criticisms concerning race might be because there were people from different races who were victimized during apartheid and who also testified. There was also intra-racial political violence during apartheid.

Third, the common problem with the TRC forgiveness rhetoric is their commitment to a particular account of forgiveness and not the ways the account was expressed. In the US context, my criticism will focus on how forgiveness was requested.

While the arguments in this chapter are helpful in seeing the moral and political benefits and problems of forgiveness requests, in chapter 4 I will show that there are distinctive features of requests for political forgiveness as practiced in America and these features have an impact on the benefits that the political requests can achieve. I will turn to a different context, with different victims, and a different set of problems. My context is not wrongs committed during apartheid but wrongs committed in the present—a time of *seeming* racial progress in America. I will explain the features and criticisms of forgiveness requests directed at black victims of white violence. These requests are motivated by a practice-based account of forgiveness, but I will argue that given the US racial context, they have certain features that can disrespect victims and block forgiveness.

CHAPTER 4

Race, Requests, and Repair

Introduction

Third parties (e.g., reporters, neighbors, fellow citizens, etc.) may make forgiveness requests as a way of trying to do what they can to help victims and the situation. This desire to help may be heightened when the wrongdoing not only has an interpersonal impact but a social and political one. As a result, the temptation to make forgiveness requests may be stronger when there is racial tension as opposed to low-level interpersonal conflict. In chapter 2 I claimed that only vulnerables' public forgiveness requests are appropriate and that they should be carried out via a predictive inquiry, check-in, and invitation. If this is the case, then it may appear that those who make forgiveness requests in their appropriate forms in the cases I discussed in chapter 1 are not doing anything inappropriate. This is because the reporters are vulnerables. Although they might not be vulnerable in the same way or to the same degree as residents of Charleston, South Carolina, their lives will be affected by the forgiveness. However, I will show that when requests are made by those who have the public standing in a context in which the wrongdoing is fatal violence and the offender is white and the victim is black, those requests not only show race-based disrespect but they could also block forgiveness.

My aim in this chapter is to provide a diagnosis of a social-political phenomenon that I refer to as the hurry and bury ritual, shining light on its general character. I will also bring clarity to the morally relevant features of the phenomenon to help us see what is morally worrisome about it. In sections 2-4 I argue that public forgiveness requests can be forms of race-based disrespect. They could also block forgiveness by being self-undermining and making forgiveness less likely. Before I present my argument, I will first discuss what I think

is distinct about public requests in the American context versus the South African context to help us see what is distinct about forgiveness requests made in response to white violence in the US. Since I will rely on the concepts of ‘ritual’ and ‘disrespect’ throughout this chapter, I will also clarify what I mean by these terms.

1. Preliminaries: US Context, Rituals, and Disrespect

1.1 US versus South Africa

The US context is different from South Africa during the TRC. Understanding this difference is crucial for: 1) making sense of the content and force of requests in the US (i.e. what can reasonably be inferred from them and stereotypes that inform them); and 2) helping us see that while forgiveness requests were made of black victims at South Africa’s TRC, the hurry and bury ritual is unique to the US racial context and raises different problems from those of the TRC. The cases discussed in chapter 1 are not a political process like the TRC. In these cases, reporters and not those facilitating truth or reconciliation, are making the requests. The cases are also not structured like the TRC. The state is not sponsoring a larger project of racial reconciliation, the wrongdoing is not looked at as recurring political violence but isolated events, and there are no projects of reparations or truth investigations on behalf of the victim. While the TRC hearings were part of a state project of moving forward without apartheid and involved actors were from different racial backgrounds, I argued in chapter 3 that the problems with the TRC forgiveness requests were independent of its racialization. This presents a stark contrast between the US and South African context. What is difficult about the US context is Americas’ unwillingness to fully admit its racist past and present; its discomfort with talking about race; the persistence of white privilege; and a lack of a politically backed racial reconciliation project.

This is not to say that there might not be a way, in what Rawls would call ideal theory, for third parties to make public forgiveness requests in the US when it comes to white violence. Requests could be made with certain acknowledgments about the US racial context and after certain moral and political conditions have been met. This would affect the requests' appropriateness. A third party requester could preface their public request with a narrative about racial injustices, acknowledgment of the victim's humanity, and an expression of what they have done or will do to systematically put an end to injustice. This sort of request wouldn't show race-based disrespect. However, in this dissertation I am dealing with non-ideal cases and unfortunately this hypothetical example is not typical of how public forgiveness requests go in the US. While I admit that there can be genuine cases of respectful interaction between a requester and a victim (as the example above illustrates), I want to highlight the kind of wrong that occurs when requests are made absent these efforts and conditions.

1.2 ***Rituals***

The forgiveness requests that were raised in the high-profile cases I highlighted in chapter 1 can be described as a phenomenon I will refer to as the *hurry and bury ritual*. This is a public ritual of quickly asking about the forgiveness of black victims of white violence. By *rituals* I mean predictable and repetitive behaviors that are done with certain goals in mind and have certain features. I place the hurry and bury ritual under the category of *racial rituals*.⁶² Racial rituals can aim to promote the dignity of one racial group or diminish the

⁶² See Lorini (1999) for her historical account of racial rituals.

dignity of another. They can also seek to unite racial groups or divide them.⁶³ The hurry and bury ritual, as a racial ritual, is predictable and repetitive behavior directed at black victims in the aftermath of white violence and is performed with certain racial reconciliatory goals in mind. It has three features—they are quick, imply a misleading narrative, and are morally asymmetrical. That is to say they are made when certain psychological, ritual, and legal markers have not been met; they tell a misleading story about US race relations; and they have a different meaning than requests made when the victim is non-black and the offense is not white violence. The ritual has these features despite the intent and race of the requester.⁶⁴

1.3 ***Disrespect***

In section 2-4 I will describe the features of the hurry and bury ritual in some detail and give charitable accounts of what might motivate each feature. However, I will also describe, despite the charitable readings, how the features show race-based disrespect. Let me briefly explain what I mean by disrespect, while reserving the proceeding sections for a more detailed account of how each feature of the ritual is a manifestation of race-based disrespect. My intention is not to give an elaborate account of disrespect. That is a topic for

⁶³ In the 19th century, parades were racial rituals of freedom for African Americans. Their features included disciplined black male participants; public space; and expressions of loyalty. Lynching was also a racial ritual. It was a repetitive practice performed throughout the 19th and 20th century. Its features consisted of belief in the myth of the black rapist, purity of the white south, the power of fire to purify, and the need for terror and social control.

⁶⁴ We can imagine living in a different US racial context. In that context the request may not have these features. However, because I am addressing non-ideal racial conditions I claim that the requests have these features given the present US racial context. The request need not have every feature in order to be disrespectful. For example, it may lack the first feature but entail the third. On my view, the forgiveness request will still show disrespect. In other words, the particular features I describe are sufficient conditions for disrespect but all features need not be present for disrespect to occur. However, requests are more than likely to have all three features given the racial context.

another dissertation. However, I want to briefly explain what I mean by it in order to help guide us in understanding why certain requests are manifestations of disrespect.

The account of disrespect that I will be relying on is failure of what Darwall (1972) calls recognition respect. This is the main account although I will supplement it with two other accounts. That is to say, I will claim that we can show recognition disrespect in three different ways.

Disrespect is failure to consider appropriately a feature of an object. The features of an object put moral constraints on our behavior. Disrespect is also an unwillingness to constrain one's behavior given these features. Humans are objects of recognition respect. Their significant feature, many have argued, is personhood. Since persons are rational and autonomous beings we should consider these in dealing with them. (We can also add additional moral rights such as equal moral status to this list.) Not weighing a person's autonomy appropriately in how we conduct ourselves with her is an example of recognition disrespect.

Darwall's account of recognition respect is helpful, but there is more that can be said about disrespect. I am going to show how disrespect can be shown in additional ways by broadening the range of its significant features. Robin Dillon (1992) points out that philosophical accounts of respect have been based on what is the morally significant feature of a person, moral rights. Since one's conception of respect will be based on one's conception of persons, Dillon challenges philosophers like Kant by suggesting that there are other morally significant features of persons. For instance, we are not just rational but vulnerable. We are not just autonomous but distinctive individuals. These are all important features. In this way, there are different ways of disrespecting beyond disrespecting a

person's moral rights. While Dillon points out several morally significant features of persons, I will focus on two for our purposes.

First, what matters about us is that we are specific individuals with particularities. We are not abstract but particular individuals. Our intrinsic worth is "what we might call our individual and human 'me-ness.'" As a result, we ought to value each person as the unique person that they are. To respect then "involves valuing and treating her not as a case of generic personhood but as the whole and concretely particular person she is" (117). To not respect others in their particularity is a manifestation of disrespect.

Second, what matters about us is that we have a unique perspective. If a person is an individual 'me', we owe her our sincerest efforts to understand her as a human 'me.' Respect is to take the fact that she has a "particular life of her own ... she sees herself, her situation, and the world from the point of view of living that life," seriously (125). To respect is to try to understand her life in her own terms. Disrespect involves a lack of this effort. It involves dealing with others through stereotypes. It also involves giving in to the temptation to project our own reality, needs, and fantasies onto the other and "to ignore and diminish the other and her construction of her experience"(126) in order to understand her. Respect, on Dillon's account, is what human 'me' demands of us (130).

Disrespect, so far, is the failure to recognize that someone is a person. It is failure to weigh appropriately a person's moral rights, particularities, and unique perspective in how we conduct ourselves. There is one last way we can show disrespect that I want to highlight. I think context matters. We can show disrespect in a contextual way by not weighing appropriately the social context (and its social meaning) in which the person is located and the request is made. I adopt the following formulation: (S) has morally significant feature(s)

(X) in context (C).⁶⁵ Disrespect occurs when we fail to weigh appropriately (X) *and* (C) in how we interact with (S).

We may find it difficult to see how certain attitudes or behaviors can still be manifestations of disrespect even when we are careful not to explicitly violate a person's moral rights. Let's consider an example of this possibility in the domain of gender to get a better understanding. Some hold the view that opening doors for women is disrespectful although it is often intended as an act of courtesy. Why might they think this? It is because the door opener is failing to consider that in a context of chivalry and thus patriarchy (C), opening the door can communicate that women are weaker than and reliant on men. Thus, we can see how it could be viewed as an act of gender-based disrespect. Even if the door opener weighed significant features of the woman as a person appropriately prior to opening the door, he did not weigh appropriately the patriarchal history and present day misogyny that informs and gives the practice a different meaning. Thus, the act is an example of gender-based disrespect. This is not to say that opening doors for women is the most misogynistic thing one could do. A behavior or attitude need not be extremely harmful in order to be a manifestation of disrespect.

Similarly, I will show how requesting forgiveness—even as a gesture of good citizenship or moral concern—can show race-based disrespect. The requester may weigh appropriately the features Dillon and Darwall points us to. However, the request can still be a manifestation of disrespect if the requester fails to appropriately weigh the social context in which requests are made. The requester may, for example, fail to consider how in a context of racial hierarchy certain requests can reinforce these hierarchal messages. When requests

⁶⁵ This is not to say X depends on C, but rather that S has X *and* lives in a particular social context.

are made anyway, they can show disrespect. This is not to say that requesting is the most race-based disrespect one can show. It is different from the disrespect that occurs in hate crimes, slavery, or the Jim Crow South. Nevertheless, it is race-based disrespect.

In summary, there are three different places where disrespect can come in. We can show disrespect in the Darwallian, Dillonian, and contextual way. That is to say, disrespect can occur when we fail to weigh appropriately significant features of a subject (including moral rights but also a person's particularities and unique point of view) *and* the social context in which they live. The recognition disrespect that I highlight in this chapter is race-based disrespect. It is recognition disrespect that happens to a particular racialized group and has particular racial meaning. Although requesting in the way I describe could be said to disrespect anyone, I will point out how requests distinctly disrespect blacks. Race-based disrespect can also involve the moral ills of racial insensitivity, racial prejudice and homogenization, and the reification of racial hierarchies. This disrespect need not be intentional to be morally wrong.

Why does disrespect matter? All persons are entitled to respect because they are persons. If recognition respect is what we are entitled to as persons then what is problematic about manifestations of race-based recognition disrespect is a failure to give black people what they are entitled to as persons. This is an entitlement to "have people take them seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons in deliberating about what to do" (38). Dillon also helps us see that since respect allows us to make our encounters with others more "fully and flexibly responsive" (131), what is also morally problematic about race-based disrespect is that not understanding blacks (through recognition disrespect) restricts us from responding in ways that take in consideration a black person's conception of her own good.

Now that I have described the US context and laid out what I mean by ritual and disrespect, I will describe three features of the hurry and bury ritual. I will argue that although the requester may make requests with certain reparative and reconciliatory aims in mind, the racial ritual actually shows race-based recognition disrespect. Requests could also block forgiveness.

2. **Quick Requests**

The first feature of the hurry and bury ritual is quickness. In this section, I will explain what I mean by quick requests and provide reasons why blacks may be more vulnerable than other racial groups to them. I will then address concerns about anger and racial violence—concerns that I think motivate quick requests. In the last section I will show how quick requests show race-based disrespect and could have a causal effect that make forgiveness less likely.

2.1 **What are Quick Requests?**

To refer to requests as ‘quick’ may present an immediate worry because ‘quick’ seems subjective. What is quick for some may not be quick for others. I may be able to move on from a relationship within six months and think six months is sufficient time to do so, whereas others (e.g., my former partner) may judge it as ‘too quick.’ How might I adequately respond to this worry?

I describe forgiveness requests as ‘quick’ if they are made when certain psychological, ritualistic, and legal markers are not present. The psychological markers I am referring to are relative to the makeup of a person. They are particular markers in the mourning or healing process. Examples of psychological markers may be the lessening or absence of grief or

shock. They can also include the obtaining of facts about the wrongdoing that will allow victims to move forward psychologically. This includes facts about who to forgive and what to forgive. Ritualistic markers may include the funeral. Ritualistic markers may also coincide with moral markers such as the receiving of sincere apologies or reparations, and denouncement of wrong doing by others or the victim. Legal markers may be arrests, indictments, or convictions. While legal markers may not always be necessary for describing or not describing a request as quick, they can be means of reaching other markers—for through investigations and trials, information that may help the victim move forward is often made public. But certain legal markers may also include moral and ritualistic markers. For example, indictments or convictions may be ways for third parties to publicly acknowledge the injustice.

Meeting these legal markers may be hard for black victims of white violence to do, making them more vulnerable to quick requests and thus the disrespect. This is because indictments or convictions are quite low when blacks are the victims of interracial violence. Given that blacks disproportionally represent hate crime victims, they are at risk of being targeted for quick requests more than other racial groups.⁶⁶ (I will mention more as we go along.)

⁶⁶ From 1980-2014, when blacks killed whites, 0.8% of the shootings was ruled justified (Lanthrop and Flagg 2017). When whites killed blacks, 17% of cases were ruled justified. Blacks are also over-represented among those killed by the police. In 2015, blacks represented 13% of the population but 26% of those killed by the police (The Washington Post 2018). In the 15 high profile cases from 2014-2016 involving the death of blacks at the hands of the police, only 8 officers were charged and indicted and only one faces prison time (Lee and Park 2017). Blacks also face a greater risk for quick requests if the goal is to quickly mitigate racial tension—a tension that reaches far beyond the victim and offender. This is because in comparison to other racial groups, the majority of racially charged hate crimes target blacks. In 2016 there was a 5% rise in hate crimes in the US and 70% of these acts were against black people (Middlebrook 2017).

My account of ‘quick’ is different from Murphy’s account of ‘hasty.’ In describing hasty forgiveness, Murphy claims that it is a ready tendency or willingness to forgive. It is prior to repentance and atonement on the part of the wrongdoer (Murphy 1988; 2003). Hasty forgiveness fails “to appreciate that there is such a thing as evil in the world and that people who do evil may be, particularly if unrepentant, legitimate objects of resentment rather than forgiveness” (2003, ix). ‘Hasty’ forgiveness then for Murphy refers to forgiveness offered when there is no appreciation of the magnitude of the wrongdoing or appropriate blameworthiness. Hasty forgiveness also omits certain conditions that need to be met in order to forgive. While Murphy only considers moral conditions, I am concerned with psychological, ritualistic, and legal markers. These are not conditions for forgiveness. The markers are not normative. They vary from individual but in a particular person’s case they may have to happen in order for the request not to be quick. For while there may be an appreciation of the wrongdoing on behalf of the offender a month after the wrongdoing, the request could still be quick if certain psychological markers have not been reached. A forgiveness request, for example, was made to Trayvon Martin’s parents five months after his death and after an apology offered by Zimmerman, but also before the trial and only just after an indictment. A forgiveness request was made in the case of Samuel DuBose before he was buried. In the case of Castile, a forgiveness request was made only one day after his murder, a day in which the family was surely still grieving and in shock.

Requests can also be quick due to broader patterns of social structure, so that what may be “quick” in the US context (given its institutional racism) might not be “quick” in another country. For example, if there are recurring acts of police wrongdoing against blacks and slow structural responses to them, forgiveness requests will generally be too quick. This is because ritualistic, moral, and legal markers have not been reached mainly because the

racial injustices are still occurring. However, if these patterns do not exist in another country, and all other markers have been met, a particular forgiveness request might not be quick, all things considered.

2.2 ***Possible Motivations: A Charitable Account***

It may be easy to read quick requests as being motivated by racist intentions. I want to add some nuance to the hurry and bury ritual not only because I do not think that everyone comes to the ritual with bad intentions but also because I want to highlight the fact that our actions and attitudes can show race-based disrespect despite our best intentions. What are some charitable ways that we can make sense of what might motivate a quick request to black victims? The requester may see the request as preventive—a call to curb violence. The thought is if the requester quickly makes the request then racial violence will not quickly ensue. There is a reason that supports this worry. It is connected to anger.

As noted in chapter 1, the emotive account and a version of the relational account entail giving up, moderating, or forswearing anger. Anger is often linked to revenge and violence. It is thought that the action tendency of anger is retaliation (Izard 1977). Martha Nussbaum (2015) thinks that anger is conceptually about payback, that anger and retribution are closely connected and she recommends that instead of getting angry, the best way to respond to great injustice is through love. Jonathan Haidt (2003) claims the action tendency of anger is to “attack, humiliate, or otherwise get back at the person who is perceived as acting unfairly or immorally” (856). A reason for the quick request is that anger leads to violence. In order to prevent immediate violence we should give up or forswear anger as soon as possible. This—requesters believe—can happen via quick forgiveness, hence, the quick forgiveness request.

Is this worry about anger and retaliation warranted? Robert Solomon (2008) argues that we do not always act violently when we get angry. Owen Flanagan notes that aggression is also connected to other emotions and is not limited to anger. For example, people are prone to be aggressive when they are ashamed, fearful, and guilty (Flanagan 2018). In these accounts, anger and aggression are overemphasized. In response, an interlocutor might note that though these other emotions and mental states might also lead to aggression, the link between anger and aggression is *much stronger* (in terms of likelihood), so we still have a special reason to be particularly watchful in this case. Black unrest like the 1965 Watts Rebellion, 1992 LA Riots, 2001 Cincinnati Unrest, and 2015 Baltimore Uprising might support this claim.⁶⁷

Quick requests for forgiveness could also be tactical—a strategic retreat so the relevant actors can fight another day. Black elites may make the request of other blacks knowing that if riots occurred police presence would increase and it would cause economic

⁶⁷ When we look at the history of black unrest one might think these incidents of unrest came about because blacks got angry, the anger then festered and grew in intensity. People fed off the anger of others, causing anger to spread. Requesters may think that they have to quickly ask black victims to forgive in order to quickly spark forgiveness and curb violence. Even in cases in which a new harm is part of an accumulation of harms, the worry is that a new outrage can make anger overflow leading to destructive, violent behavior. Two recent events provide examples of this. While the death of unarmed 19-year-old Timothy Thomas by police officers may appear to be the event that sparked the Cincinnati unrest, racial profiling by the police was rampant. Three weeks before the shooting, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the police department citing 30 years of racial profiling. After his death was reported, the 2001 Cincinnati Unrest began. See American Civil Liberties Union (2001).

In the case of Freddie Gray, citizens were frustrated and angry with a lack of transparency concerning details of the case and more importantly, a history of unjust police tactics and a pattern of government neglect and poverty. See Taibbi (2015) and Shawn Gude (2015). Citizens were angry about the *repeated* slights and violence towards blacks due to their race alone *and* the lack of civic responsiveness to their suffering. Their anger reached a tipping point, some might argue, sparking cathartic violence.

problems for the community. A sincere forgiveness request could be made as something mouthed in public to bring the temperature down and not as a request for them to actually forgive. This is not that morally objectionable. But can it and other quick requests work? There are two reasons why I think they may be ineffective.

First, the calls may prove ineffective and ring hollow if black victims are called to forgive while at the same time, slights, neglect, and violence targeted at blacks continue and there are no adequate responses to these injuries. Second, if a requester is concerned with violence, I wonder if a call for forgiveness is the correct speech act to employ. Calls for forgiveness, based on the practice-based account, are not primarily concerned with curbing violence. They are about moral practices with the aims of release, relief, and repair. While refraining from violence may be part of repair, curbing one's violence is not synonymous with repair. I could refrain from violence and yet not achieve moral repair between the offender and myself. Also, if the call for forgiveness is concerned with violence, requesters—in asking for forgiveness instead of nonviolence, for example—may be asking black victims to do something greater than what is necessary by asking them to forgive. This is because if forgiveness requests are motivated by seeing the victim participate in moral practices with particular moral aims (this may be difficult for victims to do quickly) but requests to curb violence are motivated by seeing the victim not participate in violence (this may be less difficult for victims to do quickly), then it may be less morally burdensome and more practical to explicitly ask black victims to quickly refrain from violence than to quickly forgive. The worry about anger is warranted, but could be addressed in other ways.

While worries about anger and violence can affect any victim, this worry uniquely affects blacks, making them more vulnerable to quick requests. The historical race riots that

are in the minds of lots of the American public involve blacks as participants.⁶⁸ But I am also concerned about the extent in which quick requests to curb violence and anger may also be based upon preexisting assumptions about blacks' temperament and moral proclivities, thus making blacks more vulnerable to quick requests than other groups. The two stereotypes that may inform quick requests are the Buck and Sapphire mythology—first introduced during American slavery and continuing today through media representation. The buck is the stereotypical depiction of black men as violent, bestial, and vengeful. The sapphire myth is the stereotypical image of the black woman as irrationally angry, aggressive, and hostile. If stereotypes have real-world effects in the world (as the implicit bias literature suggests) we cannot rule out the possible role they play in quick requests' concern with the anger and violence of blacks and their explanatory role for why blacks are vulnerable to quick requests. I will say more in the next section about how this is also a manifestation of disrespect since my concern with quick requests about forgiveness is not only about its practical or impractical nature as it relates to curbing violence, but about how it disrespects victims.

2.3 ***Race-Based Disrespect***

I argue that quick requests disrespect victims by minimizing the racial harm they experience and thus the feelings associated with that harm. In this way quick requests show race-based recognition disrespect of blacks.

As discussed in the preliminary section of this chapter, one of the manifestations of race-based recognition disrespect is failure to consider appropriately morally significant features of a black subject; that they are persons. White violence is often directed against a

⁶⁸ However, race riots involving whites were rampant throughout the 19th and 20th century. See Anderson (2016).

black person's dignity. It communicates that they are not persons but rather sub-persons or a means to an end. Thus white violence is an example of recognition disrespect. When Dylan Roof murdered nine black churchgoers in South Carolina, his actions and words showed race-based recognition disrespect. To minimize the harm of white violence through quick forgiveness requests can itself be an example of recognition disrespect since it can be seen as either endorsing the violent disrespect or not appropriately weighing significant features of the black victim. Quick requests to black victims manifest disrespect by violating what I call the *Too Soon Norm*.

The too soon norm suggests that a racial event has such a tragic weight that it is too soon to respond to it in a particular way now—for the black victim is not only experiencing an individual harm but aggregated racialized harms and the feelings associated with them. To do so is to minimize the harms by not responding to the black person with the consideration she deserves as a person. By aggregated harm I mean the harm of white violence that has resulted in the death of a loved one *and* also the racial profiling, stereotypes, hatred, and injustice that often occur before and after the wrongdoing.

Violation of the norm can suggest several things. I will highlight two of them here to show how each is a manifestation of race-based disrespect. First, it may suggest that the harm is not racialized (and therefore aggregated) when it is. Second, it may suggest that the harm is racialized (and therefore aggregated) but not 'that bad'. Since it is not that bad, it is not worth our full consideration. There are several things going on in each case. The first suggestion admits of ignorance. I do not think ignorance, no matter how much it is linked to innocence, does no harm in the world. It can still be a manifestation of disrespect since it can show a lack of effort in understanding a black person from her point of view (i.e., that they experience racialized harms in ways that other groups do not). The second suggestion

admits of minimization of racialized harms and the feelings associated with them that I discussed earlier. But it also shows inconsideration of the victim nonetheless. While the two suggestions may disrespect black victims in different ways, they both show race-based recognition disrespect. That is, morally significant features of the black victim including moral rights, particularities, and their unique point of view are not weighed appropriately.

Quick requests also disrespect victims by failing to show understanding for blacks. This understanding is similar to empathy (putting oneself in the other's shoes as a person equally deserving of respect). Not every instance of showing a lack of understanding or empathy is a case of disrespect. Lack of understanding is morally objectionable when it is morally called for given the type of relationship we are in and the duties that arise from it. It is also morally called for when we are in a position to do something about the victim's suffering. It is this unwillingness to make efforts to understand when it is morally called for that I think is a case of race-based disrespect.

Remember, for Dillon, we all have human "me-ness." Respecting someone is not treating them in the abstract but as a particular person, as a unique me. Since a victim is a 'me' she deserves to be seen in her particularity. Race-based disrespect occurs when we see black victims as a homogeneous group and settle with understanding them through racial stereotypes not through individual understanding. More specifically, the quick requests show race-based disrespect when they are informed by stereotypes of blacks' inability to have feelings of deep pain (stereotypes that justify the quickness). A look at the racial empathy gap research shows that whites empathize more with the pain of whites and less with the pain of blacks. When participants (all white) witnessed video clips of needles touching white and black skin, Forgiarini et. al (2011) found that participants did not respond to their pain equally. Participants responded more dramatically to white hands. The pain of black subjects

was not just disregarded, it was not even felt. White participants also took a (White/Black) Implicit Association Test (IAT). Participants were found to associate negative stereotypes with blacks and positive stereotypes with whites showing that they had a stronger racial bias against Blacks. Researchers noted, “The strength of the implicit race bias correlates with the reduced empathy for Africans’ pain.... The IAT scores of the observers significantly predict the moderating effect of race on the reaction for pain.” The presence of quick requests may show a failure to see blacks in their particularities and a willingness to view them as a homogeneous group that does not feel pain as others do. Since blacks are thought to not experience pain like others, requesters might think that they can request black victims to quickly “move on” from it. This is a manifestation of race-based care disrespect. It shows a failure of looking at a black victim as the “concretely particular person she is” (Dillon 1992, 117).

Another empathy study offers a different explanation concerning race and empathy. In a study (Trawalter et. al. 2012), white and black participants self-reported the measure of pain they felt after experiencing 18 scenarios. But when they were asked to measure the pain of others in the same scenarios, the results showed that for all participants they reported that blacks felt less pain than whites. An empathy gap was still present with diverse participants. A reason given to make sense of the result is the idea that privileged individuals (like whites) experience pain more. Those who experience more hardship (like blacks) experience pain less. Race theorist Eddie Glaude (2017) explains this by claiming that given the racial history of slavery and oppression and blacks’ survival of it, it is believed that blacks can endure pain. The failure to empathize may be informed by this view. If this thinking accounts for lack of empathy in quick request is the request still disrespectful? I think it is.

One might think that blacks' ability to withstand pain to a greater degree than whites testifies to their strength, and is a quality deserving of our respect. However, there is no empirical evidence that supports this claim. On the contrary, research has shown that doctors' unwillingness to believe reports of pain by African-Americans has led to fatal consequences for blacks.⁶⁹ Because blacks are human they feel pain just as much as whites. Certain beliefs need not be explicitly negative. They can be positive stereotypes. However, even "positive" stereotypes are not necessarily respectful. Viewing all blacks as good athletes or sexually endowed bodies are examples. In quick requests, empathy may be distorted by even positive beliefs and attitudes about blacks. Here failure to empathize is a sign of a false background conception of black people. Empathy is getting distorted as a result of the conception. But having this conception is not the only sign of race-based disrespect. Failing to revise the attitude also shows disrespect. As Taylor argues in his account of disregard, "Failing to revise my attitude, failing to work to rid myself of that belief, constitutes a kind of disregard for the individual" (Taylor (2013, 35). Perhaps if requesters' empathy were not distorted by these background conceptions of blacks, thus allowing the requester the opportunity to understand the victim as an individual, requests for forgiveness would not be quickly made.⁷⁰

My claim is not that black victims are the only victims of recognition disrespect when it comes to quick requests. Rather, I claim that—in addition to general recognition disrespect—they are disrespected in this distinct racialized way.

⁶⁹ See Freeman and Payne (2000) and Nelson et. al. (2003).

⁷⁰ I say "perhaps" here in order not to rule out the fear of violence, conservatism about institutions and society, or beliefs about Christian duties.

2.4. **Blocking Forgiveness**

How could quick requests block forgiveness? If the requester believes that the racial harm that has occurred is minimal in comparison to what the victim has actually experienced and they refuse to empathize when morally called for, a victim may find it hard to forgive. I think studies like Eaton et. al. (2006) (which I describe in chapter 3) show that confirming the damage that has occurred and not minimizing it has an effect on victims' willingness to forgive. When third parties talk to victims by telling them that they understand what has happened to them, the gravity of the situation, and why they feel the way they do, this leads to perceptual validation. Perceptual validation leads to victim forgiveness. As they note in their study, "Forgiveness was significantly higher when the response included acknowledgement than when it did not.... [Victims] felt perceptually validated.... A positive change in victims' evaluation of themselves is related to increased forgiveness" (1398). We might also conclude that forgiveness will have this effect when the response lacks this acknowledgement, although we will need more studies to empirically back up this claim.

In summary, the hurry and bury ritual has the feature of being quick. While quick requests can be explained by a concern for quick black violence, I have shown that although the worry may be warranted, it could be better addressed in other ways. Quick requests can also show race-based recognition disrespect by violating the Too Soon norm. It can also show race-based care disrespect by an unwillingness to see black victims in their particularity and understand each black person from their unique point of view. Quick requests could also make forgiveness less likely.

3. **Misleading Narratives**

The second feature of the hurry and bury ritual is that requests presuppose a misleading narrative. In this section, I will describe exchanges that impact the kind of misleading story that is told, using the Charleston and Staten Island cases as examples. Although the misleading narratives are morally problematic for a variety of reasons besides disrespect, I will attempt to provide a charitable reading of what might motivate them. I then argue that misleading narratives not only disrespect victims but also allow for a toleration of race-based disrespect and an interference with respect. I end by claiming that misleading narratives could block forgiveness in a self-undermining way.

3.1 **What are misleading narratives and their exchanges?**

Requests in the hurry and bury ritual have the feature of presupposing a *misleading narrative*. This is because, on my view, requests not only ask about something but feature in a story. In this section I will explain misleading narratives and the exchanges from which they arise. I will also briefly point out some normative concerns of the feature that are distinct from claims of disrespect.

Forgiveness requests imply a normative story (what we should do) and an identity story (who are we). The type of story the request will imply is based on the exchange that occurs between the requester and black victims. Nevertheless, because of contemporary

racial attitudes in the US like white racial innocence,⁷¹ there will most likely be part fiction or fantasy connected to the story in the ritual.⁷²

In the Charleston case, we hear the judge say, “We must find it in our heart at some point in time, not only to help those that are victims but to also help the perpetrator’s family as well.”⁷³ We then hear the family of Depayne Proctor respond, “For me? I’m a work in progress and I acknowledge that I’m very angry ...we have no room for hate. We have to forgive.” I call this the *Oh, Yes! Exchange*.

If the *Oh, Yes! Exchange* occurs then the normative story that is told is ‘We should forgive!’ The identity story that is told is “Americans are strong, united, resilient, and most importantly, not racist.” Although the normative and identity stories are both told through the exchange, the identity story will tend to be misleading while the normative story will not. Let’s return back to the Charleston case. In a Fox News interview conducted immediately after the hearing the judge stated, “I set the tone of my court ... our community is hurt, people have to reach out and tell them: it’s good to grieve, it’s best to learn how to forgive.” This is a normative story. It tells people what is best for them. But this normative story is not misleading and normative stories in the hurry and bury ritual need not be. It may be true that the community should see that forgiveness is the best thing to learn to do. Although the

⁷¹ White innocence is an attitude of viewing whiteness in positive terms—emphasizing the goodness, kindness, and cordialness of whites and denying their accountability and responsibility for racial attitudes and behaviors. This entails denying the seriousness of past or/and present anti-black racism. If racism is admitted it usually is what extreme groups do and not ordinary whites. White innocence also entails a break between racism of the past and racism of today. Because of white innocence, a white person will be unable to see her own racism. See Feagin (2000).

⁷² (For more on false narratives - although she does not term them as such: see Arendt (1968, 21-22.) Contrasted to the false narrative requests are true narrative requests. The alternatives I highlight in the last section of this chapter provide examples of true narrative requests - requests that aim to tell a true story as opposed to a fictitious one.

⁷³ I take these words to not only be a statement but an implicit forgiveness request.

normative story is not misleading, there are other moral problems with it. Forgiveness occurs as a result of the authority that the judge exudes in his courtroom. The statement suggests that a different tone, set by a different judge would have yielded a different outcome. This minimizes the agency of the black victims that was exercised in the courtroom. It suggests that black victims only forgave because of the tone the judge set and not because of their own will and initiative. I will say more about victim agency later in this section. The judge's statement is also paternalistic and insensitive for he claims that learning to forgive is better than grieving even though there have only been two days since their family members were murdered.

The identity story is found in the statement: "You saw what these people did, these people in Charleston, our citizens, they hurt, but they will learn how to forgive," he said. The exchange yielded a particular identity story: we as residents of Charleston are hurt, but we forgive. Like the normative story, the statement "they will learn how to forgive" is also paternalistic. But it is also misleading. Given that debate about the confederate flag and its removal will occur 10 days later (sparked by the removal of the capital's flag by activist Bree Newsome), it is surprising that Roof's racist act is treated as an isolated event and not as a manifestation of what happens when white supremacy (whose symbol some might argue, blows at the state capital) is not systematically addressed. The forgiveness in the courtroom becomes about one man who was troubled and not about a community with racial issues. I will discuss this further in section 3.2.

This normative and identity story is not only explicitly told by the judge but it is implicitly found in news headlines after the hearing. *Time Magazine* dedicated a cover that said, "What it takes to forgive a killer." This is a normative story informed by the *Oh, Yes! Exchange*. It not only tells us to forgive but how to forgive. A New York *Daily News* cover

ran an excerpt from a victim's statement that read, "We forgive you, hate won't win." This is an identity story. Although "we" is directly referencing the victim's family, it can be interpreted as an American "we."⁷⁴

It also contrasts the churchgoers favorably with Dylann Roof. The black family that has forgiven are heroes that we should all look up to, with their faith and strength, while Roof is not. The churchgoers are exemplars within the identity story. Although the news stories could also be seen as a positive story about black Americans in particular, in telling such an identity story we risk telling a misleading story about race relations in America.

Contrasted with the *Ob, Yes! Exchange*, is the *Hell, No! Exchange*. Recall the reporter's interaction with Esaw Garner. The reporter asked, "Can the family have it in their heart to accept the officer's apology?" (An apology from the officer was made available to media outlets.) Mrs. Garner responds, "Hell, No! Time for remorse would have been when my husband was yelling to breathe." I refer to this as the *Hell, No! Exchange*.

Unlike the *Ob, Yes! Exchange*, the identity story in the *Hell No! Exchange* does not tell us who *we* are. Rather it tells us who the victim is. Here are a few headlines describing Mrs. Garner: "Eric Garner's Wife Lashes Out at a Cop Who Killed Her Husband" (Keneally 2014), "Hell No, Eric Garner's Widow Rejects Officer's Condolences" (Workneh 2014), and "Wife's fury after cop who killed Eric Garner offers family his condolences" (Gardner 2014). These headlines describe Mrs. Garner as angry and perhaps even justifiably so. This identity story is not misleading. She is angry. Contrasted with the *Ob, Yes! Exchange*—which tells an identity story not only of the victims but the community—the identity story in the

⁷⁴ Several writers interpreted this statement as an invite for us all to fit under the category of "we." See OSV Weekly Editorial Board (2015).

Hell, No! Exchange only tells an identity story of the victim. It stops with her. This is what makes it misleading. It tells a story that she is the only person angry and justifiably so.

There are several reasons for why the identity story stops with the victim in the *Hell, No! Exchange*. There is an incentive to stop at the victim's response because it runs counter to the palpable, softer narrative that marginalized people are forgivers. It also disrupts a story that is entrenched in the dominant American narrative—"we are a just nation." We can describe and even understand her anger—for it is her husband whose life has been taken away. We can understand why she would be angry at his death. It is a tragic moment in her life, an 'isolated incident.' Stopping at her anger in the identity story isolates her response from other incidents and people's angry responses to them thus creating a misleading picture about black life in America. We fail to see how systematic white violence is by stopping at her identity story. One cannot understand the anger of those outside of the family if one thinks these cases of white violence are isolated. Only her anger is more likely to look appropriate or proportionate since it is not 'their' family member's life that has been taken away. Only her identity story is more likely to be told.

The *Hell, No!* Exchange also doesn't yield a positive normative story and thus it is less likely that a consistent narrative will emerge that can be taken up by the community. One reason might be because when I say no, there's not yet a normative principle being made available to other people. When a victim responds to requests, it can be taken as consent or refusal of a normative principle. In the *Hell, No! Exchange* the victim may be refusing a proposal of a normative principle that's being *offered by the community*.

3.2 **Possible Motivations: A Charitable Account**

If narratives are misleading as I describe, what is a charitable way that we can make sense of why would one be tempted to make a request that implies a misleading narrative? Perhaps the exchange will increase morale in a time of racial tension. People are trying to figure out how we can make sense out of the events and move forward. It is not misleading that our morale may need to be increased and that Americans need to be united. I can see the need for such aims. However, the problem is the willingness to tell a misleading story in order to achieve them. As long as we attempt to achieve these aims by promoting fantasies, we will not achieve true unity but only an illusion of unity. We only hide and go back to business as usual: a life in which some lives are valued more than others.

3.3. ***Race-Based Disrespect***

Misleading narrative requests show race-based disrespect in three ways. The first way in which requests disrespect black victims is that they romanticize the reality of black victims. Romanticizing the reality of black victims occurs by propagating an idealized story of what the black victim has experienced and thus, the racial world that the victim lives in. If recognition respect is about taking a person seriously as someone who has a particular life of her own and “trying to understand her and her world in her own terms,” then disrespect involves taking the short cut by projecting “our own reality ... fantasies onto the other [blacks]” that makes understanding her and her situation much easier (Dillon 1992, 126). As a matter of respect, we should respect the reality of blacks. Misleading narrative requests show race-based disrespect by not doing so. Roxane Gay describes how this happens:

The call for forgiveness is a painfully familiar refrain when black people suffer. White people embrace narratives about forgiveness, so that they can pretend the world is a fairer place than it actually is, and that racism is merely a vestige of a painful past instead of this indelible part of our present.... It's much easier to introduce forgiveness into the conversation, than to sit with the reality and consider all who are complicit (Gay 2015).

Misleading narrative requests do not allow us to sit with the racial reality of victims. They distort it. This is what Glaude refers to as disremembering. Disremembering is a “national refusal to remember.” It is used to allow us to escape historical facts and it distorts who we take ourselves to be. Disremembering also allows us to escape and distort the present reality of the value gap; the fact that white people are valued more than others. Collectively forgetting this fact, Glaude argues, “is crucial in determining the kind of story we tell ourselves.... America is a democracy ... that’s our story. To believe this, we have to forget and willfully ignore what is going on around us... Forget all the bad stuff that cuts short the illusion that we are an example of democracy already achieved” (2016, 48). Misleading narrative requests contribute to this illusion. There is no racism, just isolated individuals who have gone astray. This is a projection of a fantasy and not an understanding of “her world in her own terms.”⁷⁵ Thus, it shows race-based disrespect. Let’s return to the idealized case that I briefly raised in the preliminary section. What if a requester was to make a public

⁷⁵ Victims in the high profiled cases I highlight do not come to press conferences as only persons who have lost a loved one through violence. They often see the white violence that has occurred as historical and systematic and not incidental or isolated. They are not blind to the dimension of race at play and the increased vulnerability to such violence given their race. The Movement for Black Lives arises in the aftermath of the death of Trayvon Martin. Many believed that white violence enacted on black people was evidence that black lives do not matter to the larger part of society. BLM is a movement that intervenes in these cases of white violence with the ultimate goal of affirming black life. Although ‘mattering’ is the language BLM uses, its useful to examine how value and respect are connected here. Recognition respect is the fitting response to the distinctive value persons have equally. Dignity is recognition respect’s object. We cannot show recognition respect to persons we regard as worthless. Instances of white violence as well as inadequate responses to these cases from the legal community and the larger society, some believed, showed race-based recognition disrespect. And it occurred because, in their eyes, black victims did not have dignity. Thus, we can view the hurry and bury ritual as a phenomenon that arises out of race-based disrespect and also shows race-based disrespect. Although we might argue that disrespect in the first instance was much worse, I attempt in this chapter to explain how the ritual is also disrespectful.

forgiveness request and preface the request with an acknowledgment of the victim's reality? They would then not romanticize the victim's reality. However, even with an acknowledgment, race-based disrespect can manifest in other ways. This is because misleading narrative requests also show race-based disrespect by romanticizing *the victim*. Romanticizing victims allows for a toleration of race-based disrespect. It also interferes with respect. I will show how all three are possible.

Romanticizing the victim involves viewing the victim as angelically Christian,⁷⁶ and therefore willing to put up with all suffering. This treats black victims as servile. To treat blacks as servile is to fail to acknowledge their full moral status. As persons we have the moral right not to suffer at the hands of others. To paint a picture of blacks as willing to suffer is a failure to acknowledge them in their full moral status. Romanticizing victims in this way shows race-based disrespect. Romanticizing the victim in this way can also be used to provide grounds for the *toleration* of race-based disrespect. One who is angelically Christian can put up with continual race-based disrespect. As a result, one might think that there are at least few to no prudential reasons to be alarmed or responsive when black victims encounter this disrespect through white violence.

By romanticizing the black victim in this way we also do not see her in her particularity. Instead, she becomes the ideal we assign to all blacks that suffer harm. She is romanticized as an *overcomer*. An overcomer is strong and 'over' their victimhood (or so it may be assumed). This race-based disrespect can also *interfere* with other acts of respect. When we think that someone has overcome what has happened to him or her, we are likely to think they are no longer in need of our care or attention. Thus, romanticizing the victim

⁷⁶ By "angelically Christian" I am referring to viewing the victim as possessing saint-like and/or martyr like qualities like longsuffering, compassion, and self-sacrifice at all times.

as an overcomer (which “forgivers” are thought to be) romanticizes victims in ways that relinquishes us of the need to be responsive to them. It’s a relinquishment that is based on no reliable evidence.

Robin James (2015) captures this romanticization point and its logic in her analysis of *resilience discourse*. She also allows us to see how such toleration and interference can occur. James is criticizing resilience discourse in popular culture. Songs like “Survivor” by pop group Destiny’s Child is an example of the discourse. They sing, “I’m a survivor. I’m not gon’ give up. I’m not gon’ stop. I’m gon’ work harder,” several times throughout the song. Audiences reward the group for their ability to survive. As an audience, we feel that their survival is our survival. However, the song and popular culture never give *adequate* descriptive and critical attention to the event that has made the artists into survivors. What happens instead is a romanticization and celebration of their survival while the oppression stays the same: unexamined, uncriticized, and untransformed. But without this examination, there cannot be a proper moral response to what is wrong. Appraisal, instead, becomes *the* response.

This discourse not only occurs in popular culture but in society. The distortion told by the misleading narrative requests follows a similar discourse logic. Victims are asked about their forgiveness, they are praised for forgiving, their forgiveness is seen as a miracle, and their strength to forgive is seen as our strength as a nation. However, the causes that give rise to forgiveness requests (white violence) and ways to address them are not addressed or examined. What society does instead is celebrate black forgivers but never adequately seeks to understand and address the continual oppression or violence that is the cause of the harm. This has an effect on the disrespect we tolerate. But it also has an effect on the respect we might extend to black victims in the future. This is because race-based disrespect can

distort what the black victim is in need of. When we fail to consider a black person's unique point of view by withholding empathy and understanding, then when we do decide to be responsive, we may be ineffective since we lack a proper understanding of what the individual victim needs.

The final way in which misleading narratives show race-based disrespect is by failing to recognize the full and complex agency of the victim. The agency that is being appealed to in the requests is quite narrow. The exchanges described above are all or nothing binaries. The requesters do not take into consideration the moral grayness and complicated nature of forgiveness. Some victims are grappling with self-respect and are capable of forgiveness. Some do want repair but are concerned about how their forgiveness may be seen as complicity in anti-black racism. Other victims want political peace but may want the offender to pay for his crimes. Still others are just not ready to forgive although they believe it may be best for them. Being human admits of complexity. However, the narrative provides a simplified version of what it is to be a victim and human. Oh Yes/Hell No exchanges do not deal with the moral grayness and thus our complex agency. They flatten agency by oversimplifying it. While other racial groups may get the opportunity to be imperfect forgivers, blacks in these instances, are not privy to this opportunity. They must be perfect forgivers or no forgivers at all.

In summary, requests in the hurry and bury ritual imply a misleading narrative. Which normative and identity story will be told will depend on the exchange that occurs. I have argued, given the US context, that the identity story in the hurry and bury ritual will always be misleading. My concern is not only epistemic. Misleading narratives romanticize the reality of victims and they also romanticize victims. I have shown that when they do, they show race-based recognition disrespect because they do not acknowledge the full moral

status of blacks. They also show race-based disrespect because they do not see blacks in their particularity but project a fantasy instead. Romanticizing victims in these two ways can also lead to a toleration of race-based disrespect and interfere with future acts of respect. Misleading narratives can also disrespect victims by failing to recognize their full agency. Before we move onto the last feature of the ritual, let me briefly explain how misleading narrative requests can block forgiveness.

3.4. **Blocking Forgiveness**

Requests that imply a misleading narrative can block forgiveness because they can conceptually make forgiveness impossible. Remember, on the practice-based account, one of the functions of forgiveness is repair. Repair is not restoration or a return to purity. Repair can be partial or comprehensive, can leave a scar, and can involve patchiness and so on. A repaired door needn't be an unbroken door. Forgiveness repairs but can't make it so that nothing was/is broken. The misleading narrative requests—with their emphasis on innocence—are asking for something via forgiveness that forgiveness can't do. They are asking that forgiveness restore us back to our perfect state. But there is no perfect state to return back to. More importantly, forgiveness cannot return us back to a perfect world. To request that victims forgive in order to restore them back to an innocent society does not allow forgiveness to do what it can do. In this way, it blocks forgiveness for it is asking that forgiveness perform a function that it cannot do.

4. **Asymmetrical Requests**

The third feature of the hurry and bury ritual is that requests are asymmetrical. In this section, I argue that given the racial context in the US (recall (C) in the disrespect

formulation discussed in the preliminary section of this chapter), victims can reasonably infer meanings from the public requests that show race-based disrespect. I will describe these meanings and also give a charitable account of what may motivate the asymmetrical requests. I then argue that despite the motivation, the requests with their implied meanings disrespect victims. I also claim that these requests could block forgiveness.

4.1. *Asymmetrical Requests and their Motivations*

The requests are asymmetrical in two ways. The first is asymmetry in fact. The requests are made publicly in high-profile cases when victims are black and the perpetrators are non-black or when the perpetrators are acting on behalf of the state. However, in high profile cases where the victims are white and the perpetrators are black, the ritual is missing. If you were to compare the five cases that I raised in the beginning of this work with five high-profile cases in which the perpetrators were black and victims were white or state actors, you would not see the ritual present. Cases I am thinking of are the 2002 DC sniper, the 2013 Washington Navy Yard Shooting, the 2013 Ex-cop Chris Dorner's revenge shooting, the 2016 Dallas police shooting; and the 2017 shooting of an Australian woman by a Black Muslim cop. A distinctive feature of the hurry and bury ritual is that it makes forgiveness requests asymmetrically.

However, even if we were to solve the asymmetry in fact problem by ensuring that forgiveness requests were made to every victim regardless of their and the perpetrator's race, I do not think this will solve the moral problems of the hurry and bury ritual. This is because in addition to the asymmetry in fact, there is (more importantly) an asymmetry in valence. Asking about forgiveness in a context in which the victim is black and the offender is white and the wrongdoing is fatal violence has a different valence than in other contexts, in which

the offender and victim are both black or white or the offender is black and the victim is white. This is because the requests have a different meaning than requests in these other contexts.⁷⁷ This is due to the racial history, pattern of acts, and asymmetrical oppression and power relations in the US. These meanings are manifestations of race-based disrespect. Before we get to how this is the case in section 3.2, let's look at what might motivate asymmetrical (in fact) requests.

Requesters may be making forgiveness requests only to blacks for several reasons. One might make the request because the requester is appealing to the agency of black victims. Given that a crime has occurred, the power is in the state's hands to prosecute the offender and (in cases of police brutality) in the police department's hand to change their policies. The requesters may understand that there is not much that black victims can do but forgive. The request may be a reminder of what the victim can actually do given external forces at work.

The request may also be an appeal to the Christianity of black victims. Half of the requests were prefaced by an acknowledgment of the religious faith of the victims. In other cases in which victims' forgiveness was not asked for, victims announced their forgiveness as a Christian obligation. Empirical evidence shows that blacks are more religious than whites and women are more religious than men (Masci et. al. 2018). Recognizing the relationship between Christianity and its emphasis on forgiveness, the requester may be appealing to the black victim's faith, particularly black female victims and not in an exploitive way. Seeing

⁷⁷ This is not to say that wrongdoing occurring in this racial context is morally worse than the other contexts I described above. I am only noting that since these other contexts lack the racial history and asymmetrical oppression, requests made in them will have a different valence given their different implied meanings than requests in the hurry and bury ritual.

black victims profess their religion in public may be taken as a reliable sign that it is morally permissible to make forgiveness requests to them. Requesters could also be making requests to blacks because although the requesters are not Christians, they could be asking out of respect for the victim's beliefs. It could also be a strategy to draw on those convictions to prevent a worse wrong. Although this may be objectionable on other grounds, it is not disrespectful. Or the requester actually shares in the victim's religious convictions and their moral framework more broadly, and is appealing on behalf of a fellow Christian. The appeals both to agency and to Christianity are quite similar to what the forgiveness discourse of the TRC was described as doing.

The requester may also make an asymmetrical request because the stakes are different and even, some might argue, higher in these cases than in others. Given the racial nature of the cases, the cases may remind us that racial injustices are not only historical but very much part of our present; they may force us to talk about race; they may lead us to interrogate claims of social and institutional progress; and they may make us consider the possibility of civil disorder and disruption if we fail to interrogate these claims. These stakes are not as present in cases where there are black offenders and white victims or in cases of white violence enacted on non-black victims.⁷⁸

In the next section I argue that despite these motivations, the requests take on a different meaning when directed to blacks. Given the US racial history, oppressive patterns, and attitudes about race in the US, black victims can reasonably infer racial meanings from the requests. These meanings show race-based disrespect.

⁷⁸ This is not to say that racial resentment may not come about as a result of black-on-white crime or that other communities of color are not outraged at police brutality and racial violence.

4.2 **Meanings and Race-Based Disrespect**

When requesters publicly ask about blacks' forgiveness in response to white violence, their actions have a different significance and meaning than in the converse. I have argued that those in the hurry and bury ritual are motivated by the aims of relief, release, and repair. However, given the US racial context and the race of the victims and offenders in these cases, we might want to look closer at *what* is intended to be relieved or released through the requests and *for whom*. What inferences can black victims reasonably draw from these forgiveness requests? The answer is *relief* from white discomfort, *release* from moral action, and superficial *repair*. In the following, I will describe these different meanings and explain how they show race-based disrespect.

Black victims can reasonably infer that forgiveness requests in the hurry and bury ritual mean requests for *relief* from white discomfort. DiAngelo (2011) describes this need to escape racial discomfort as 'white fragility'. Whites are often protected from discussing race and therefore have an expectation for racial comfort. They do not carry the psychic burden of race because they do not often think about it since race is thought to "reside in people of color" making whites not see themselves as racialized subjects (Dyer 1997). As a result, whites typically do not develop the psychological stamina to think and talk about race like other racial groups. When whites are confronted with racial issues—given that they typically have an inability to handle racial stress due to this white protection—they often respond with various emotions such as guilt and/or behaviors such as leaving the stress-inducing situation. When white violence occurs in the high-profile cases I have described, the topic of race and racism is bound to arise. This is an example of what DiAngelo describes as both a challenge to white liberalism (that even the "non-racist" can engage in racist behavior) and a challenge to white racial codes (codes that say whites should be comfortable). When these

challenges (or triggers) occur, the disequilibrium they create becomes intolerable for whites. In response, blacks can reasonably infer that a requester makes a forgiveness requests out of a desire to escape this white discomfort. The requester can do this on behalf of himself (if he is white) or other whites (regardless of the race of the requester). The forgiveness request then becomes a way to escape the racial discomfort that white violence and black victimhood has introduced. Perhaps if forgiveness is brought up—the thought is—we can all move on from the uncomfortable race conversation. The forgiveness request then, on this view, becomes an “interruption to what is racially unfamiliar” (DiAngelo 2011, 57). White discomfort leaves when forgiveness is introduced. This move ensures that racism and injustice will not be dealt with.

How does this show race-based disrespect? What is being suggested by the request is that what is of utmost concern for the requester is not the black victim, but the requester and his whiteness. The requester has put a premium on his humanity at the expense of the humanity of the black victim. We can imagine the request being put in a more explicit way, “Make me more comfortable, please! Stop talking about race.” (But white violence, in cases like the ones I raise, cannot be easily separated from discussions about race. Race is embedded in it.) This is said during public attempts to address and make sense of the harm that the black victim has just experienced. The requester is thinking about white discomfort at the expense of black pain. This is racially insensitive and it is disrespectful. The requester is using the black victim as a means to an end. He is using the victim to make him feel better as a white person under the moral notion of forgiveness. But blacks are not things to be used to satisfy our own ends. They, like all humans, are ends in themselves.

The inferred meaning is also a manifestation of race-based disrespect because the requester is showing an indifference to the black victim. The meaning of the request implies

that black victimization at the hands of white violence does not matter or does not matter as much as white comfort. We all have equal moral standing as humans. Our interests matter for their own sake. Indifference says they do not matter. To say they do not matter is to suggest that black victims have little or no moral status. But we all have equal moral status as persons. To act as if we do not is disrespectful since in doing so, we fail to weigh appropriately a morally significant feature of a person, her moral status. To inappropriately weigh this feature by showing indifference is to show disrespect.

Victims can reasonably infer that forgiveness requests in the hurry and bury ritual also mean *release* from moral action. Requests can be read as ways of ducking individual responsibility for making any moral decisions. In response to white violence, the requests ask ‘not what we can do for them, but what blacks can do for us’ during this tense political time. The responsibility for doing something in response to white violence is left up to blacks instead of individual whites asking themselves if they have failed to take action to prevent or lessen the problem of white violence and what they can do in the future (e.g., make appeals to fellow whites, etc.).

How does this show race-based disrespect? What is being suggested by the request is a reinforcement of a whole system of race-based labor. The request treats blacks as underlings, people who work on behalf of whites. They are asked to do all the work required to make things better by forgiving. While deferring to the moral actions of blacks may seem like a granting of agency to blacks, overloading burdens to blacks fails to treat black victims as equals.⁷⁹ A racial hierarchy is reified in this way. Hierarchies are not merely rankings of

⁷⁹ This is one of the reasons, I think, that anti-racist organizations emphasize collective action. To get around this disrespectful deference, white “allies” are encouraged to use their privilege, resources, and powers to enact change. All the work is not left up to black and brown folk.

value based on race. Hierarchies are lived out through social roles. That is to say, hierarchies are reinforced by the roles certain identities are supposed to take on. Examples are the American slave system and India's caste system. What we are expected and designated to do and not do (because of our racial identity), reifies a racial hierarchy.⁸⁰ Designating blacks to do all the labor required to fix our racial problems, is a manifestation of race-based disrespect.

One might argue that the claim above shows only that the requester sees the moral actions of blacks as the solution and providing a solution to a problem is not necessarily bad. On the contrary, it could be empowering. Inferred requests to be released from moral action are a manifestation of disrespect in another way. When blacks are 'the' solution to injustice (meaning the only solution) then blacks are not only a solution. They are a problem that must solve itself. Let me explain how this is the case and how it connects to disrespect.

⁸⁰ There are several racial hierarchy models defended by race theorists. In the bipolar model, whites are at the top and blacks at the bottom and the hierarchy is static. Some theorists (Goto 2017; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006; Gold 2006) have criticized the bipolar model for several reasons. They argue that other racial groups are absent; racial categories are neither neat nor static; the bipolar model limits the way in which race affects groups who are neither white nor black and it prevents full understanding of the racism they experience. Lastly, some criticize the model for attempting – in a limiting way - to capture a group's overall experience in a monolithic top-down hierarchy. In response, I take on a multi-racial model that suggests that the hierarchy consists of several racial and ethnic groups. This hierarchy places whites – and those who are read as white – at the top and others beneath them. This hierarchy acknowledges that some groups may move up and down the hierarchy (such as the Irish in the US). It also takes into consideration colorism, a phenomenon in which those with lighter skin are deemed better than those with darker skin. This hierarchy also makes room for other forms of racialization such as religion. For example, although a Syrian may have light skin like American whites, they may not be treated as white because of their religion or immigration status. I think this racial hierarchy model not only responds to criticisms of the bipolar model but it also provides a more precise picture of the hierarchy I believe is reified in the hurry and bury ritual.

Consider this common move: “Our race problem would be resolved if blacks would stop talking about race or concentrated on the present and not the bad racial past.” Here, blacks are the problem (they talk about race) and they are ‘the’ solution (they stop talking about race). The “problem” is not the race problem. Similarly, the problem, in our cases, no longer becomes about white violence but the victims’ refusal to forgive. But blacks can solve this problem by forgiving. In this way, they are not only the solution but also the problem.⁸¹ Blacks are not a creative solution that can solve “the country’s” white violence problem. This is because the problem is not in Northern police departments or Southern streets. The problem is in the victims’ refusal to forgive white violence so that the US can heal. The solution is never about correcting patterns of white violence. Rather, the problem and solution is blacks’ forgiveness responses. This not only fails to show blacks’ proper moral consideration as persons, but it disrespects blacks by viewing them through an inferiorizing lens. It says blacks—even when they are victims—are a problem.

Lastly, victims can reasonably infer that forgiveness requests in the hurry and bury ritual mean *superficial repair*. As mentioned in sections 3, requests can romanticize the reality of victims by depicting a misleading picture of current race relations. They depict white violence as isolated and not systematic, and racism as a thing of the past and not a problem of today. If white violence interrupts the picture that America is beyond its racial past, forgiveness requests can be the glue that mends the picture. Since blacks can reasonably infer that requests mean release of white discomfort and relief of moral action, blacks can also infer that requests also mean *superficial repair*—for only superficial repair can be achieved given these other aims. By superficial repair I mean moral repair in appearance only.

⁸¹ See Hall (1990) for more on ‘blacks as the source of the problem.’

How does this show race-based disrespect? What is being suggested by the request is that the requester wants to do repair on his own terms. This is disrespectful to victims in that it doesn't take into account the black victim's needs and desires. Her particulars are disregarded. It also suggests that superficial repair is sufficient. This is disrespectful because the victim's practical judgments are not considered (Gauthier 1963, 119). The requester decides what is adequate while disregarding the victim's own agency. This could be because the requester thinks he knows better than blacks.⁸² It could also be because the requester is indifferent to black victims' experiences of harm. Since the requester is indifferent, true moral repair is not needed. If the victim's experiences of harm do not matter, a proper solution does not matter. Superficial repair will suffice.

What could also be inferred by a request for superficial repair is that *superficial* repair is an apt response to a *superficial* wrong. A *significant wrong* did not in fact occur. (e.g., The situation has nothing to do with race.) Therefore, the victim's account of wrongdoing is inaccurate and her affective response is misplaced. This is a manifestation of disrespect for several reasons. First, it denies the rational capacities of the victim. It suggests that she is incapable of understanding the wrongdoing, even when she has accurately done so. It also disrespects the victim by disregarding the particulars of the trauma she is experiencing. It ignores and diminishes her experience of wrong and victimization. She is not understood on her own terms. It pushes back against her unique perspective. It says, "You ought to have my interpretation of events instead."

In summary, given the racial history, pattern of acts, and asymmetrical oppression and power relations in the US, requests for forgiveness made to black victims of white

⁸² Shiffrin (2000) describes this as a paternalist motive.

violence have a different meaning than when made to white victims of black violence. Victims can therefore reasonably infer that these request mean *relief* from white discomfort, *release* from moral action, and superficial *repair*. These meanings show disrespect in a variety of ways ranging from reinforcing a racial hierarchy to lowering the moral status of black victims. Although a requester may think they have properly weighed the significant features of a victim prior to requesting, I have argued that by not also weighing the US racial context in which these requests are made, requests can take on a meaning of their own. These requests, with their meanings, disrespect black victims.

4.3 **Blocking Forgiveness**

Requests that are asymmetrical in fact or in valence could also block forgiveness. As we see in the case of Esaw Garner, the request can make victims resistant to forgiveness. When black victims are asked to do things that other citizens are not asked to do, the victims could become resistant to that action. In a democracy, some citizens will be asked to sacrifice more than others. But as Danielle Allen (2004) points out, the challenge in a democracy is to take turns at sacrifice. Old habits of citizenship entail “assigning to one group all the work of being sovereign, and to another group most of the work of accepting the significant losses that kept the polity stable” (41). Good habits of citizenship entail understanding the need for taking turns at losses as well as gains. A victim may be resistant to asymmetrical requests because they find themselves caught in old habits of citizenship (their group is assigned all the work of forgiveness).

When black victims are asked about their forgiveness with these inferred meanings *and* if these victims are self-respecting and do not accept their inferiority, they may be resistant to forgiving if the request reifies a hierarchy, for example. This is because by

forgiving they might think they are endorsing the claims of their inferiority. Victims could also be resistant to forgiving if requests take them to be the problem but in fact the problem lies elsewhere. Refusing forgiveness may be a way of resisting such a claim.

Conclusion

In summary, forgiveness requests made in the US racial context in response to white violence are quick, presuppose a misleading narrative, and are asymmetrical—they mean something different when requested to blacks. Although requesters may make the requests with the aim of release, relief, and repair, there are moral and practical problems involved. My argument gives us reason to criticize the utility of present-day political forgiveness discourse in the US and to watch out for its trappings. More importantly, I hope my argument can inspire new ways of speaking about and addressing white violence and racial repair in ways that respect victims and do not get in the way of moral aims.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Philosophers of forgiveness tend to focus on three major themes: 1) the nature of forgiveness, 2) the standing to forgive, and 3) the utility and moral value of forgiveness. You will notice that these themes focus primarily on the victim or forgiver (e.g. they ask: What is the victim doing when they forgive? Who can forgive? What happens when one forgives?). Less attention is given to offending parties and third parties in the exploration of these themes.

One way that philosophers have shifted their focus from victims to other parties have been through apologies—asking what an apology is, when are they appropriate, and what might public apologies do? I think this is a move in the right direction—for in taking our focus off of what victims do we remind ourselves that other members of the moral community have a role to play in responding to wrongdoing and going about the work of repair. But while apologies have received philosophical attention, forgiveness requests have been neglected. When they are discussed, they are often conflated with apologies. I think this is unfortunate. I hoped throughout this dissertation to have shown why forgiveness requests are deserving of philosophical attention. I hope that by doing so I have contributed to an underdeveloped area in the field. This project is not only a contribution to moral psychology but also social and political philosophy, and philosophy of race.

In this dissertation I examined the question (and its many forms): “Can you find it in your heart to forgive?” In asking the question I was not interested in the answer but in the question itself: What motivates it? Who has the standing to make it? What does it do in the world? I did not examine what victims should or should not do nor did I evaluate

when victims have done it properly. Rather, I turned the evaluative microscope on us as requesters. I am interested in what parties—particularly third parties—do in engaging with and responding to victims publicly through these requests.

I began in chapter 1 with real-life examples of requests about forgiveness offered by third parties to secondary victims. I asked, what are requesters asking for when they offer up requests? I suggested that to get at this answer one needs an account of the moral practice itself. I argued that the two popular accounts of forgiveness—the emotive and the relational account—do not help us get at why someone would make the request. I claimed that the practice-based account of forgiveness does. Throughout the subsequent three chapters I looked at forgiveness requests in the private and public sphere—paying close attention to their forms, appropriateness, who has the standing to make them, and what they might achieve. I wondered to what extent the standing could change when they leave the private sphere and enter the public. I then moved more specifically to the political sphere by looking at political forgiveness requests in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). I examined the ways in which the TRC is both a good and bad model of forgiveness requests. I argued that the practice-based account of forgiveness would have helped the TRC escape harsh criticisms. But I also argued that even the good parts of the TRC might not transfer to the current US racial context. In chapter 4 I looked at forgiveness requests in the US. I analyzed requests made to black victims of white violence and explored the ways in which they disrespect victims and could block forgiveness.

In the rest of this chapter, I will briefly summarize my arguments as well as offer suggestions for future research. In chapter 1 I attempted to get at what motivates forgiveness requests. I claimed that forgiveness requests are requests about interrelated

practices and to get at why one would make the requests, one needs an understanding of the moral practice itself. The two most popular accounts of forgiveness—the emotive and relational accounts—do not capture why one would make the requests. Versions of the emotive account of forgiveness are concerned with the giving up, moderating, or forgoing of resentment and other negative attitudes. Are requesters making requests because they are concerned about the moderation or eradication of negative emotions? I do not think so. There is more that they are after than a change in emotion. The emotive account also doesn't explain what requesters are after when the victim does not show negative emotions. Therefore, using this account to illuminate the dynamic of making requests is insufficient.

I then turned to the relational account of forgiveness. Versions of this account are concerned with forgiveness as a moral relation between individuals and forgiveness as a morally reparative process. Are requesters making requests because they are concerned about relations? My answer was no. I then explained that the practice-based account improves on these accounts in explaining why someone would make a forgiveness request. According to the practice-based account, forgiveness is a set of broad and interrelated moral practices (cognitive, performative, affective, and relational) with the aim of relief, release, and repair for the victim and offender. The strength of this account is it helps explain what a requester is after when they request forgiveness.

Having laid out an account of forgiveness that helps explain what someone is after when they request forgiveness, in chapter 2 I looked at who has the standing to make requests. I stated that offenders who are attributively and substantively responsible; complicit offenders, third parties with a responsibility link; vulnerables; and entrusted parties have the standing to make forgiveness requests. But standing is not enough. The

form of the requests matters. I then looked into the nature and appropriateness of forgiveness requests. Drawing an important distinction between requests and apologies, I sorted forgiveness requests into two categories: requests for and requests about forgiveness and determined if those who have the standing to make requests have the standing to make them in their appropriate form.

Demands in the blame sense, demands in the command sense, repetitive pleas, and pleas as invitations are examples of requests for forgiveness. I described demands in the blame sense as when forgiveness is demanded as an act of blaming the victim for not forgiving. The victim is blameworthy for not forgiving if the harm is a slight. I argued that because not all acts are slights and the wrongdoing that I am most concerned about in this dissertation involves white violence that results in death, no one has the standing to make requests as demands in the blame sense in these contexts. Demands in the command sense are when we tell others to forgive by appealing to authority and not to moral reasons. I argued that they show a lack of respect for morality and the victim and therefore no one has the standing to make these requests. Requests for forgiveness that consist of repeatedly and emotionally begging for forgiveness are always inappropriate and no one has the standing to make them because they pressure victims and are insensitive. I also looked at pleas as invitations. These are polite invitations for the victim to forgive. I claimed that offenders and third parties have the standing to make these invitations but can only make them when certain conditions have been met and when the invitation is not a moral test.

Requests can also be requests *about* forgiveness. They take the form of inquiries. There are three different kinds of inquiries: predictive inquiries, introspective inquiries, and check-ins. Predictive inquiries ask about what the victim will do in the future with

their forgiveness. Those who have the standing to make forgiveness requests have the standing to make predictive inquiries. The upshot to these inquiries is they do not put victims in the position in which they have to make a decision now, thus lessening the pressure; the inquiries allow them to change their minds and can allow the victim to present their own moral preconditions to forgiving. But not all predictive inquiries are created equal. Even the tone of the inquiry can change the force of it, moving it from an inquiry to a demand. In this case no one has the standing to make the requests. Requests can also be introspective inquiries. These inquiries are requests for access into the inner world of the victim. Since these inquiries ask for inner access, only those who already have permission to access victims' private lives—like entrusted parties and intimate vulnerables—have the standing. Requests about forgiveness can also be check-ins. Check-ins are inquiries into if the victim has forgiven yet. Check-ins are only appropriate for those who have the standing when they aim for mutual confirmation. This is because requesters are seeking verbal confirmation of what they believe they have witnessed already.

Does this standing transfer to the public sphere? I argued that only vulnerables maintain their standing in the public sphere. The potential for social pressure and moral grandstanding cancels out offenders. Since entrusted parties are private parties they lose their standing in the public. Vulnerables maintain their standing because they could be asking on behalf of other vulnerables in a space that concerns them all. The appropriate requests they can ask are predictive inquiries, check-ins with evidence, and pleas as invitations.

After looking at the appropriateness of requests in their transition from the private sphere to the public sphere, in chapter 3 I looked at probably the most famous historical

example of public forgiveness requests in a political context—the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I explained the reason and rationale behind the TRC. I then looked at forgiveness requests in the TRC hearings, identifying several examples made by offenders and also the commission. Examples included predictive inquiries and invitations. I then offered a sympathetic reading of forgiveness discourse in the TRC noting the benefits that they brought to the process of national reconciliation. I argued that the requests were means to reconciliation and that they showed the value of forgiveness. They also empowered victims by giving them the opportunity to exercise autonomy on a public stage. Because the requests were made in a context in which the requesters were also seeking the truth, providing reparations, and acknowledging victims' experiences, requests opened up the possibility of forgiveness even if they did not guarantee it.

I then turned to the pitfalls of forgiveness requests in the TRC. I claimed that although forgiveness was used to solve a political problem, the account of forgiveness the commission motivated was limited and inappropriate. I cited three problems with the requests: 1) the false dichotomy criticism, 2) the pressure to forgive problem and 3) the exclusive view problem. I ended the chapter by thinking of ways in which the practice-based account of forgiveness would have helped the TRC escape these criticisms. I argued that since the practice-based account is a set of interrelated moral practices, it would have offered victims more expansive options than what the false dichotomy offered. Because the practice-based account is not a religious account of forgiveness, it would have been a proper account to employ in a pluralistic society. Also, the pressure to forgive would have decreased if the TRC adopted the practice-based account because they would have looked at forgiveness as a process instead of something that immediately

brings about closure. While we can learn something about the TRC we also have reasons to pay close attention to its pitfalls.

In chapter 4 I switched to a different political context—the US racial context. Some might think that the TRC and its forgiveness requests is a perfect model to adopt when trying to solve racial issues in the US. I argued that the US context is quite different than South Africa. Requests made in the US in which the victim is black and the offense is white violence have distinctive features that are worthy of its own investigation.

I returned to the forgiveness requests examples I opened with in chapter 1. In these high profile cases, reporters are asking about the forgiveness of black victims of white violence. I argued that requesters, as vulnerables, intend to spark forgiveness through the requests. But given the US racial context, these requests have certain features no matter the intentions of the requester. These features actually show race-based disrespect and could actually block forgiveness.

I described requests in this context as the hurry and bury ritual. There are three features of the requests. First, requests are quick. While being sympathetic to the reasons that may motivate quick requests, I argued that these requests disrespect victims because they minimize the aggregated harm black victims experience and they show a lack of understanding for victims. They could also block forgiveness—for empirical evidence has shown that lack of confirmation of wrongdoing has a negative effect on forgiveness.

The second feature of requests is that they imply a misleading narrative. Through the “Oh Yes/Hell No” binary a normative and identity story is told that paints an illusory picture of race relations in America. They also disrespect victims by idealizing what the victim has experienced and in doing so ignoring their suffering and normalizing their

oppression. The requests could also block forgiveness because by painting an illusory picture, they ask of forgiveness what it cannot do—return us back to a perfect world.

The final feature of these requests is that they are asymmetrical in fact and in valence. By asymmetrical in fact I mean that blacks are disproportionally asked about forgiveness more than whites. By asymmetrical in valence I mean that asking for forgiveness in this racial context has a different valence than other contexts. It has this valence because the requests mean something different than in other contexts. They implicitly mean requests for white relief, release from moral action, and superficial repair. These requests disrespect victims because they use blacks as a means to an end, disregard black victims' agency and their experiences of harm, and they reify a racial hierarchy. The requests could also block forgiveness since they could make victims who do not endorse these disrespecting claims resistant to forgiveness.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is future research to consider after engaging with this project. I will discuss two in what follows.

I concluded chapter 4 by arguing that forgiveness requests made in the US racial context disrespect victims and could block forgiveness. Because I pointed to the need for third parties to participate in the work of repair, I do not think the problems with these requests are solved simply by *not* requesting. I think we need to change the questions we ask. Below I have briefly proposed some alternatives to forgiveness requests that can achieve the moral aims of release for the victim, relief for the offender, and repair for both without the risk of disrespecting the victim and possibly blocking forgiveness. They are incomplete and are worthy of more attention.

The first alternative question to forgiveness requests is: “What do you want to tell us?” This seems like a simple question but it provides an opportunity for the victim to report to us whatever she wants. She may report that her son was not a monster; she feels pain; and this can happen to any black person. She may even report what she witnessed. This question is counter to the false narrative request. While the false narrative request is based in fiction, this question aims for the truth. In cases of state violence and anti-black violence, the details of what actually occurred are unclear, hidden, or delayed. Often body cameras are turned off, there are no eyewitnesses, police falsify reports, and the “true” intentions of the perpetrator are unknown. The truth is hard to find. The question “What do you want to tell us?” provides a space for truth. False narratives contradict the truth, the one and only objective truth. The victim’s perspective helps restore that.

The first question is also counter to false narrative requests in that it does not aim for romanticization or deny victimhood. The question allows victims to be victims; for in response to it the victim may report her pain, disappointment, and loss without the need to transition to forgiver – a position that forgiveness requests often aim to put victims in. This question can also achieve the aim of release for the victim. Providing victims the space to speak and to be listened to can offer release. But it can also aid in forgiveness. As Eaton (2006) notes, when third parties provide perceptual validation — which begins with listening to the victim tell their story—it aids in forgiveness.

The second question is: “What can we do for you?” This question provides an opportunity for the victim to explain how her political fellows—requesters and witnesses—may help. It doesn't ask that victims do anything. It asks, instead, what victims would have others do for them. The victim could tell reporters what kind of story to write or how other citizens can join her in protesting and engaging in institutional pressure.

The second question is also counter to asymmetrical requests with its non-reciprocity. Victims are not asked what they should do but what others can do to help them. Unlike asymmetrical requests, the second question suggests that third parties also have a moral obligation to respond to victims. Providing victims the space to speak and for others to respond to them can offer a form of release and it can also aid in forgiveness as we saw in the TRC Human Rights Violation Hearings. Recall that in addition to asking about their forgiveness, commissioners at the TRC amnesty hearings also asked whether the TRC could do something to help victims. Unlike the TRC, I propose we ask these latter questions and not make forgiveness requests.

The third question is: “What do you want to occur?” This question is different from “What can we do for you?” The second question applies to her fellow citizens. However, her fellows can only do so much. The third question can also apply to institutions. The victims could respond to the question with “I want justice” or “I want body cameras.” These are things that only institutions or people in power can bring about. The third question is also an aspirational question. The victim could express future aspirations. The victim could respond with “I hope we all just get along” or “Talk about ways in which we are complicit in racism.” The question can provide victims with the opportunity to make political and moral demands. The third question can also allow victims to inspect how they might move toward a better, safer, transformative position—not only for herself but for other victims and marginalized folks. Given the aspirational and institutional possibilities of the question, it can help achieve moral repair. This is because it allows listeners to know what is needed for healing to occur.

The third question also counters the minimization of damage implied by quick requests. Instead of violating the Too Soon Norm and thus minimizing the damage,

“What do you want to occur?” confirms that the event has such a tragic weight that a response is needed. Part of responding to the victim with care entails asking the victim the most appropriate way to respond given the victim’s preferences and desires. Such a request may, instead of blocking forgiveness, aid in forgiveness in that it can provide incentives for victims to forgive. For if victims’ desires are honored, this may provide moral reasons for victims to forgive.

I think race and forgiveness deserve more consideration. I am influenced by research on gendered forgiveness in thinking about racialized forgiveness. Feminist philosophers Kathryn Norlock and Alice MacLachlan (2009; 2012; 2015a; 2015b) have looked at how forgiveness is gendered. Gendered forgiveness is the unequal expectation that women should forgive because forgiveness, along with other soft virtues such as compassion and love, are gendered virtues, character traits, and attitudes that women ought to have by the fact that they are women. Gendered forgiveness is the practice in which forgiveness becomes praiseworthy or blameworthy based on one’s gender. Gendered forgiveness also explains the double bind women often find themselves in when they forgive. Because they are women, they are expected to forgive while men are not. When they actually forgive, their forgiveness is often not viewed as genuine forgiveness while when a man forgives his forgiveness is considered genuine. Their work is illuminating for it helps us see how an awareness of the salience of gender complicates the general views proposed in philosophy of forgiveness. I also think an account of racialized forgiveness is needed for similar reasons.

A few philosophers have written about race and forgiveness. For example, Macalester Bell (2012) argues that reparations within a political context like Post-American slavery may provide moral reasons for blacks to forgive. Howard McGary

(2003) thinks that reparations are not a species of reconciliation and that reparations do not require reconciliation. Both Bell and McGary look at reparations and forgiveness in view of African-Americans and American slavery. While this work is a contribution to issues of race and forgiveness, it is limited for it mainly focuses on reparations and historical injustices and it contingently rather than essentially considers race in the process of forgiveness. I wonder to what extent does race determines what is forgiven, who is expected to forgive, the forgiveness exemplars we rely on, etc. Racialized forgiveness has been overlooked by generalist accounts (much like the aforementioned gendered work). I think an account of racialized forgiveness is richly abundant and deserves more attention.

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