

Forgiving Grave Wrongs

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Abstract

We introduce what we call the Emergent Model of forgiving, which is a *process-based relational* model conceptualising forgiving as moral and normative repair in the wake of grave wrongs. In cases of grave wrongs, which shatter the victim's life, the Classical Model of transactional forgiveness falls short of illuminating how genuine forgiveness can be achieved. In a climate of persistent threat and distrust, expressions of remorse, rituals and gestures of apology, and acts of reparation are unable to secure the moral confidence and trust required for moral repair, much less for forgiveness. Without the rudiments of a shared moral world – a world in which, at the very least, the survivor's violation can be collectively recognized as a violation, and her moral status and authority collectively acknowledged and respected – expressions of remorse, gestures and rituals of apology, or promises of compensation have no authority as meaningful communicative acts with reparative significance. Accordingly, we argue that repair in the wake of traumatic violence involves 'world-building,' which supports the ability of survivors to move from despair to hope, from radical and disabling distrust to trust and engagement, and thus from impotence to effective agency. Our Emergent Model treats forgiveness as a slowly developing outcome of a series of changes in a person's relationship to the trauma and its aftermath, in which moral agency is regained. We argue that forgiveness after grave wrongs and world-shattering harm, when it occurs, emerges from other phenomena, such as cohabitation within a community, gestures of reconciliation, working on shared projects, the developing of trust. On this view, forgiveness is an *emergent* phenomenon; it entails taking and exercising normative power – coming to claim one's own moral authority in relation to oneself, one's assailant, and one's community. The processes that ultimately constitute forgiving are part and parcel of normative repair more broadly construed.

Key Words: Apology, atrocity, forgiveness, genocide, moral repair, mutual recognition, reconciliation, resentment, respect, Rwanda, trauma, validation, voice, violence

Sometimes, when I sit alone in a chair on my veranda, I imagine a possibility. If, on some distant day, a local man comes slowly up to me and says, 'Bonjour Francine.

Bonjour to your family. I have come to speak to you. So here it is: 'I am the one who cut your mama and your little sisters.' Or 'I am the one who tried to kill you in the swamp and I want to ask your forgiveness.' Well, to that particular person I could reply nothing good. A man, if he has had one Primus beer too many and then beats his wife, he can ask to be forgiven. But if he has worked at killing for a whole month, even on Sundays, whatever can he hope for pardon?

We must simply take up life again, since life has so decided... Thornbushes must not invade the farms; teachers must return to their school blackboards; doctors must care for the sick in health clinics. There must be strong new cattle, fabrics of all kinds, sacks of beans in the markets. In that case, Hutus are necessary... We will begin to draw water together, to exchange neighbourly words, to sell grain to one another. In twenty years, fifty years, there will perhaps be boys and girls who will learn about the genocide in books. For us, however, it is impossible to forgive.

--Francine Niyitegeka, Rwandan genocide survivor¹

I see too many difficulties for us to exchange forgiveness on the hills. Too many bad memories will grow again on the fine words, like the bush in the middle of a plantation. Someone who grants you forgiveness on a day of mercy, who can't say he will take it back some other day in anger, because of a drunken squabble? I can't imagine any forgiveness capable of drying up all this spilled blood.

--Pio Mitungirehe, Rwandan génocidaire²

1. Introduction

Genuine forgiveness can be crucial to breaking cycles of violence and destruction in ways that exceed fragile forms of stability grounded in coercion, threat, or fear. Yet, in some cases, the risk of forgiving may be greater than the risk of not doing so. In cases of grave moral wrongs, forgiveness must be granted, if at all, only with utmost circumspection. In this paper, we consider the nature and possibility of forgiveness in response to grave moral wrongs, wrongs perpetrated what we call 'world-shattering' harm. Our focus is on the Rwandan genocide. The demands of peaceful cohabitation and national reunification pressure many Tutsi survivors, who are a minority within a minority in Rwanda, to strive to forgive their former neighbours who perpetrated slaughter, rape and wanton destruction against

them.³ Memories of the atrocities make it difficult – and for many, impossible – to forgive, if by ‘forgive’ we mean, as Charles Griswold and others have held, ‘to understand, to relinquish revenge and resentment, all the while holding the offender responsible.’⁴ Many survivors seek personal freedom from the consuming hatred, resentment and fear that perpetuate their suffering and make the possibility of forgiveness remote at best. And some Rwandan survivors, like survivors of other genocides, claim to forgive their assailants. We want to try to understand how forgiveness might be possible and what it would entail for those who suffer world-shattering violation and loss.

To these ends, we explore a model of forgiveness we call the Emergent Model. This new account of forgiveness departs from the standard, Classical Model, according to which the victim extends forgiveness to the perpetrator as a result of a deliberate decision following a morally reparative transaction – a transaction aimed at securing forgiveness.⁵ In the wake of world-shattering wrongs, we maintain that familiar forgiveness-seeking acts (e.g., gestures and rituals of apology, compensation, repentance) cannot have meaning as such unless a process of forgiveness is already firmly underway. Acts and gestures of these kinds can find no moral foothold – no shared and trustworthy moral order – in which to have reparative meaning and significance. They may carry familiar symbolism for survivors and perpetrators alike, but this alone is not sufficient for moral repair, for such symbolism is rooted in a world now lost to wanton destruction.⁶ We believe that forgiveness is possible, even in the wake of grave world-shattering wrongs, but not without what we call shared ‘world-building.’ World-building, as we will explicate further, consists in cooperative work through which victims and perpetrators are joined in developing shared moral norms, embodied in emerging but stable social practices.

The Classical model successfully captures an important paradigm, suited to many cases of forgiveness in everyday life – cases concerning moral harms ranging from minor to serious. Griswold’s account illustrates the Classical framework when he says:

In the paradigmatic interpersonal scene that provides our touchstone, the offender has injured a specific individual; the offender asks the victim for forgiveness; which, if granted, is bestowed on the offender.⁷

On the Classical Model, moral injury is followed by a call (‘please forgive me’) and a response (positive or negative). Our concern with grave harms that shatter worlds raises the possibility of forgiveness emerging from a process not directed at forgiving in this way, in which the call and response are not central, not explicit, and if they occur, occur so late as to be largely

symbolic. Griswold's account, like many Classical views, rightly emphasizes the importance of moral transformation in the offender, which brings about changes in the injured person's assessment of the offender. We agree that transformation of the offender is crucial to substantial forgiveness. In cases of grave wrongdoing, however, this model leaves the survivor too much at the mercy of the offender, taking forgiveness out of her hands while she awaits the call to forgive. We propose an alternative model, not as a substitute suited to all cases, but as one we believe helps make sense of forgiving grave, world shattering wrongs.

In cases of grave wrongs, forgiveness must emerge slowly, over time, and paradigmatically through endeavours bringing survivors and perpetrators into forms of cooperation – forms of cooperation that are not themselves directed to forgiveness. Through such cooperative endeavours, mutual recognition between survivor and perpetrator slowly evolves, beginning a process of moral transformation in which reparative acts can have meaning.⁸ On the Emergent Model we propose here, forgiveness is, of necessity, a multifaceted, complex, and often jagged process, through which both trust and hope gain a foothold under conditions of perilous normative disorientation and moral insecurity, slowly contributing to conditions through which robust, and potentially enduring, forgiveness evolves.

2. Sweeping Fear Away

On both the Classical and the Emergent models, paradigmatic cases of forgiveness bring the survivor a sense of freedom, escape from the haunting effects of the wrong committed against her. She experiences an abatement of animosity, fear or vengeance, and releases the wrongdoer from continued resentment. Édithe Uwanyiligira, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi, says she chose to forgive in order to release herself from relation to the perpetrators:

I know that all the Hutus who killed so calmly cannot be sincere when they beg pardon, even of the Lord. For them, the Tutsi will always be their enemy. But I myself am ready to forgive. It is not a denial of the harm they did, not a betrayal of the Tutsis, not an easy way out. It is so that I will not suffer my whole life long asking myself why they tried to cut me. I do not want to live in remorse and fear from being a Tutsi. If I do not forgive them, it is I alone who suffers and frets and cannot sleep. I yearn for peace in my body. I really must find tranquillity. I have to sweep fear away from me, even if I do not believe the soothing words of others.⁹

Expressing extraordinary resilience and resolve, Édithe seeks refuge from her suffering, freedom from the haunting effects of the violence committed against her and others. If successful, Édithe may find personal peace, inner tranquillity, even healing. Yet not every road to peace is a road to forgiveness.

The call and response framework does not fit in Édithe's case. Édithe does not seek apology, reparation, expressions of remorse, or pleas for pardon from her assailants, for she thinks these 'cannot be sincere.' Édithe is realistic in not trusting that those who committed grievous wrongs against her will respect her worth or face the wrongs they have committed. Remarkably, under the circumstances, Édithe maintains a clear sense of her own value and worth. She believes her peace, if it is found, will be found through disconnection from the perpetrator, abandoning all hope in the possibility of reconciliation and mutual understanding. It is true that the abatement of animosity, resentment, or vengeance, can bring psychic liberation. But on the view of forgiveness we articulate here, a unilateral shift of the kind Édithe undertakes is not in itself forgiveness. Forgiveness is not something the survivor can bestow, like grace, upon the perpetrator, nor does it consist in the achievement of inner freedom and peace, though it may bring both.

Forgiveness, when possible, both requires and itself helps to constitute a distinctive form of moral repair. Margaret Walker notes that victims of violent wrongs:

need to know that others grasp the fact of the violation, its clear wrongfulness, the culpability of the perpetrator, and the reality of the harm and suffering caused them, in order to be validated. They need the affirmation of their entitlement to repair, and to be supported in seeking it or to have others seek it on their behalf.¹⁰

In order to *heal*, victims need to give voice to their experience of violation and loss and to know others in their community validate the wrongfulness of what they have endured. In order to *forgive*, victims need to be able to give voice to their experience and to receive understanding, validation and respect *from those who wronged them, those they would forgive*.

Crucially, on our view, *forgiveness entails the victim's taking and exercising normative power, thus establishing her moral status and authority in relation to her assailant and her community*. This reassertion of moral status cannot be a solely internal (or subjective) matter, as it is for Édithe. It must be inter-subjective, involving the acknowledgment and recognition by the offender of the survivor's moral status and, correlatively, of the nature and seriousness of the wrongs committed against her. If the offender does not acknowledge the survivor's moral status and authority, then what might

at first seem to be forgiveness is better characterized as letting go or showing mercy, or perhaps even pardoning, excusing or condoning. Forgiving, unlike letting go, showing mercy, pardoning, and the like, is inherently relational.¹¹ This relationality is at the heart of the cruel challenge of forgiving grave harm. It asks that the survivor maintain a connection to the perpetrator, in seeking his moral understanding, recognition and respect.

On the Classical Model, a realignment of moral status and authority occurs through a transaction between victim and perpetrator: You wrong me; you later acknowledge your wrongdoing, express sincere remorse, and offer me an apology; I judge your apology to be genuine, demand (just) reparation, you meet my demands; I forgive you. In emphasizing a transactional dimension, the Classical Model rightly highlights the relationality of forgiveness; in emphasizing acts of apology, reparation, and the survivor's authority to grant or refuse forgiveness, it rightly highlights the survivor's moral status and authority. Both of these features – the relationality of forgiveness and the authoritative moral status of the forgiver – are key, we believe, to forgiveness properly understood.¹² But for forgiveness to be achievable through the Classical transaction, it must at the very least be possible for the perpetrator to *acknowledge* his or her act as wrong *in virtue of* his or her *recognition of the moral status and authority of the victim*.¹³ Recognition of the moral status of the victim and acknowledgment of the wrong committed go hand-in-hand; both are essential to forgiveness. The Classical Model is thus viable only insofar as the survivor and the perpetrator engage *within a shared moral order*, one in which the moral status of the victim is securely established.¹⁴ In the aftermath of world-shattering wrongs, no such order exists.

3. World Shattering Wrongs

The Rwandan genocide, like all genocide, raises difficult questions about the nature of forgiveness. Although highly organized, the Rwandan genocide was intimate and personal. It was not action at a distance, but was enacted by Hutus, hunting, raping, beating, torturing and killing their Tutsi neighbours.¹⁵ The devastation was swift and ferocious, leaving nearly a million dead, hundreds of thousands orphaned, and survivors who called themselves *bapfuye buhagazi* (the walking dead).¹⁶

When a world shatters, those whose world it was lose moral orientation. Language and action make little sense, reasons and motives become obscure, and norms that were formerly shared with others cease to have authority. The sense of safety and predictability is gone, so too is a framework of understanding in which the grievous moral damage endured might be voiced and validated.¹⁷

Four years after the genocide, Innocent Rwigyira, one of only twenty survivors of the six thousand who fled to the Kayumba Forest, said:

A survivor cannot help always going back to the genocide. For someone who did not experience it, there is before, during, and after the genocide, and it's all life being lived in different ways. For us, there is before, during, and after, but they are three different lives, and they have broken apart forever.¹⁸

Innocent adds: 'The survivors tend not to believe that they are truly alive anymore – in other words, that they're still the same people they were before, and in a way, that's a little how they keep going.'¹⁹ Like Innocent, survivors whose worlds are shattered often express a feeling of having 'outlived themselves,' of having occupied radically disconnected worlds, worlds impossible to reconcile and understand within one framework of meaning. This speaks to a sense of lost personal unity, of shattered identity. Claudine Kayitesi captures this sense of rupture when she says:

Good fortune has offered me a second life, and I will not turn it away. But it will be a half-life, because of the complete break. . . . To be betrayed by your neighbours, by the authorities, by the Whites – that is a staggering blow. It can make one behave badly.... But to be betrayed by life... who can bear that? It's too much. You lose all sense of where the right direction lies.²⁰

Claudine's claim to have been 'betrayed by life' reflects the scope of the devastation she and other survivors endure. The world in which they find themselves is one devoid of moral and social order. Violence and destruction have left no apparent bridge to the world that was lost; only chaos and debris remain.

When a world shatters, even the very meaning of words can change. Sylvie Umubyeyi, a survivor and now a paediatric social worker, says that 'the genocide has changed the meanings of certain words in the language of survivors, while other words have flatly lost their meaning, and anyone who listens must be very wary of these changes.'²¹ Umubyeyi's observation is consonant with Simon Wiesenthal's remark, in *The Sunflower*, that in the concentration camps, the meanings of words became suspect, untrustworthy, because Nazis used them in connection to actions that were (at least initially) unforeseeable (and ultimately inconceivable in the terms of a familiar world, now lost). For example, 'registration,' which seems benign enough, often led to death: 'The oftener they registered us, the fewer we became.' In Rwanda, terms for agricultural activities became genocidal code – e.g., 'work' became 'killing,' 'clearing the tall trees' meant 'kill the Tutsi,' and so on. In both cases, the link between meaning and action is profoundly altered in a shift

from the old world to the new. Wiesenthal captures the despair of lost meaning:

It is impossible to believe anything in a world that has ceased to regard man as man, which repeatedly ‘proves’ that one is no longer a man. So one begins to doubt, one begins to cease to believe in a world order in which God has a definite place.²²

Violence that shatters worlds destroys all regard for the sanctity of the victim’s life, uses her body to demean and humiliate her, and targets and desecrates shared sources of meaning and value. In cases of moral atrocity (like genocidal murder, torture, and rape), the moral ground has given way to wanton destruction and degradation. There is no moral foothold for stable recognition of the victim’s moral status. There is thus no shared normative framework in terms of which a perpetrator can understand, let alone sincerely acknowledge and repent, the wrongs he or she has committed. So too, the survivor’s confidence in her own moral worth – her personhood – is often shaken, for she has lost both trust in the norms that define that personhood, and also her fluency in the language of those norms. Here, a process of forgiveness cannot be grounded in an existing moral order, nor is there a reservoir of trust on which to draw.

World-shattering wrongs thus resist forgiveness. In the Rwandan genocide, as in all genocide, the scale of the crimes committed was so overwhelming that forgiveness may seem offensive and appalling. Even talking about forgiveness in the face of atrocities is problematic. Claudia Card notes, “‘resentful,’ ‘angry,’ and even ‘indignant’ grossly under-describe characteristic moral responses to atrocities. We resent insults, cheating, and unfairness. But evils leave us speechless, appalled horrified, nauseated.”²³ Forgiveness, Card claims, cannot be the ‘antidote to speechlessness, horror, nausea.’²⁴ Card anticipates our Emergent model in claiming that after atrocities, forgiveness should be granted, if at all, ‘only slowly and with caution, depending on what the perpetrator does (by way of confession, apology, reparation, regeneration).’²⁵ Our view of forgiveness emphasizes the last of these, namely, *regeneration* – and, we would add, *generation* – of shared normative structures, a shared moral world, in which survivors and perpetrators can develop mutual moral recognition and understanding, thereby paving a way for the possibility of forgiveness.

4. World-Building and Normative Repair

As we have emphasised, the challenge facing survivors of atrocity lies in finding a ground for moral repair in relationship with, rather than disconnection from, those who perpetrated heinous crimes against them.

Normative repair in the wake of traumatic violence involves what we call '*world-building*,' which is crucial to the ability of survivors to move from radical and disabling distrust to trust and engagement, from experiences of impotence to the possibility of effective agency, and thus from despair to hope.

Given scarce land and limited resources, survivors remaining in Rwanda have practical reasons to live and work together with perpetrators. As Francine Niyitegeka notes, survivors on all sides of the conflict must get back to the business of living.²⁶ Renewed relations among neighbours was necessary for restoring basic security, tending to needs for shelter, food and medical care, and rebuilding an economy. Yet the haunting ease with which neighbours had turned on neighbours with machetes – slaughtering, raping, and mutilating – made this prospect treacherous and unwise. It was imperative that a system ensuring basic security be established first. As necessary as such security would be, however, it could not come close to achieving moral repair, which requires developing a framework establishing mutual recognition of the moral crimes that had been perpetrated. As Walker writes:

...moral repair is served by authoritatively instating or reinstating moral terms and standards within communities where wrong may have caused fear, confusion, cynicism, or despair about the authority of those standards.... [M]oral repair is served by replenishing or creating trust among individuals in the recognition of shared moral standards and in their responsiveness to those standards and support of the practices that express and enforce them.²⁷

Mere cohabitation with people who represent an enduring threat will not, of course, generate the conditions necessary for moral repair. If the perpetrator still, even quietly, accepts the genocidal project, or if lingering fears and doubts persist, survivors cannot begin to trust, much less to forgive. The question of persistent threat makes acts of apology, explanation, expressions of remorse, and other behaviours of the perpetrator suspect and potentially dangerous. The degree of damage done and the heinousness of the wrong committed make a difference to the very possibility of creating trust, and establishing mutual recognition and responsiveness to shared norms. Pio Mitungirehe, convicted génocidaire, voices the concerns of many when he says that he '*can't imagine any forgiveness capable of drying up all this spilled blood.*'

Worlds can be damaged to different degrees and in different ways. For a victim of a direct, individual crime, such as theft, rape, or kidnapping, in a non-conflict situation, it may be possible to return to a world shared with

others – a world in which acts of theft, rape, or kidnapping are securely recognized as the violations they are.²⁸ Much may be lost and destroyed for the victims, but the world within which they have lived remains more or less intact. This is especially the case if the wrong committed against them is widely acknowledged as a wrong and their experience of the violation is validated and, ultimately, vindicated through protective and punitive efforts. This is not the case for the survivors of genocide whose world has shattered. In the before-during-after scenario described by genocide survivors, the world that has been so thoroughly shattered is lost; little remains to be rebuilt. Hope must lie in the possibility of creating a new world.

The new world under construction inevitably contains the debris of the past world, for there can be no historical or normative purity. The shattered fragments of the old world are painful reminders of loss, so survivors face the issue of how meaningfully to incorporate these shattered fragments without sinking under their weight. For those most alone, there is often little, if any, basis for trust in the power of shared norms of conduct and meaning that can validate and vindicate their experiences of grievous crime and loss. The sense of moral isolation and disorientation is profound. Those who flee may adopt a new world, slowly integrating into it, learning its norms, and gaining fluency. Those who remain must build a shared moral world together. Building a new world requires finding a ‘we’ – others with whom a collective sense of purpose and identity can emerge – one that fully incorporates a consciousness of the moral damage done.²⁹ This is especially difficult for survivors who must construct worlds with the very people who have committed atrocities against them.

In the case of world-shattering wrongs, the Classical model of transactional forgiveness falls short of illuminating how genuine forgiveness can be achieved. In a climate of persistent threat and distrust, expressions of remorse, rituals and gestures of apology, and acts of reparation are unable to secure the moral confidence and trust required for moral repair. Moreover, for such acts even to have meaning as forgiveness-seeking acts, more than a reasonable confidence in one’s safety is required. The perpetrator’s acknowledgment of wrongdoing and recognition of the survivor’s moral status will need to be robustly secured and evidenced; it must be developed and integrated into shared moral understandings and expectations, through forms of positive, engaged cooperation that have gained stability. These achievements require survivor and perpetrator to move from mere cohabitation to interactive engagement, to interdependence and reasonable trust. In the absence of at least the rudiments of a shared moral world – a world in which, at the very least, the survivor’s violation can be collectively recognized as a violation, and her moral status and authority collectively acknowledged and respected – expressions of remorse, gestures and rituals of

apology, or promises of compensation have no authority as meaningful communicative acts with reparative significance.

5. Emergent Forgiveness

On our model, forgiveness emerges, when it does, from the many phenomena involved in world-building, beginning with cohabitation within a community and small gestures of reconciliation, which slowly build trust. On this account, the perpetrator's acknowledgment of wrongdoing and recognition of the survivor's moral status develops over time through forms of positive, engaged cooperation. A culture of fragmented persons who live side by side with minimal and distrusting interactions will not create a normative moral order from which forgiveness can emerge.³⁰

World building is not a solo activity; one always starts somewhere, with someone. In Rwanda, a major difference amongst survivors is between those who were radically alone as they fled to the marshes or the forests to hide and those who were hidden by someone, a caretaker offering a lifeline. Both were hunted, and lived with fear and despair. The hidden may often have had fears about their caretakers, because discovery would put the caretaker's own life at stake.³¹ Nevertheless, those who had another person had a connection in the world, a person with whom their interests were intertwined, and this made a crucial difference to their post-traumatic resilience. Some who were left alone report that their psychological and emotional attachments were put on hold. Hope and trust were lost; confidence in the power of normative action was lost, even saying 'we' was lost.³²

The ability to say 'we' is regained slowly. Forgiving grave wrongs is, as we have noted, of necessity a non-linear process that is dynamic, complex, and jagged. We see forgiveness emerging from world-building illustrated in a story we heard from a Rwandan priest we know:

On a hill near Butare, a nun, Sister T, was working with Tutsi survivors, all women, bringing them together to do some weaving and sewing. At first no one spoke much, and some participated reluctantly. Slowly, without pressure, and by creating a safe haven, Sister T brought the survivors into a small daily community. Slowly isolation waned. Eventually, they began to open up to each other, talking first about mundane things and then about more serious matters. This process took some years, until the women began to think of themselves as a community.

As the survivors worked together, wives of the génocidaires would walk by, one by one, carrying each

day's food to their imprisoned husbands. Every day, these Hutu women would walk many miles to the prison and back. Eventually, little by little, the Tutsi women developed sympathy for their Hutu sisters, themselves imprisoned in this routine of serving their husbands, over whose criminal behaviour they lacked control. During the genocide, many Hutu women enjoyed the benefits of their men's looting, continued to feed the men, take care of their homes, and failed to protect their Tutsi friends. Still, the Tutsi women began to feel a connection to the Hutu women, for they too had lost a great deal to the violence and destruction. Eventually, they began to invite some of the Hutu women to join their projects, and slowly, over time, the community became integrated. Slowly, forgiveness emerged. There was no single moment of decision to forgive, but there were many small choices concerning inclusion and exclusion, safety, what to share and what not to share, and so on. These choices ultimately generated new relationships that embodied forms of forgiveness.³³

In the life of a genocide survivor, the move from isolation to limited engagement to fuller engagement and trust is a significant journey of increasing agency and self-articulation. The Tutsi women in Sister T's collective first began in isolation, and very slowly began to interact. Their interaction developed from sharing tools to working together in shared enterprises. There was no clear moment when they moved from 'I' to 'We'; there was no definite moment when a collective moral identity was established. Including the Hutu women was not an act of forgiveness, yet it initiated a process of forgiving, a process in which suspicion and animosity could abate and mutual understanding and acknowledgment could grow.

Imagine two (hypothetical) women from this collective, five years after the genocide. Let Aimee be a Tutsi survivor and widow, and Berta be a Hutu whose husband is in prison. After working together for several years, Berta's question to Aimee is unlikely to be 'Will you please forgive me?' but rather 'Have you forgiven me?' On the Emergent model, shared practical, moral, and emotional pursuits change the urgency and timing of such a question, submerging the importance of particular acts explicitly seeking or bestowing forgiveness. In cases of world-shattering wrongs, apology and reparation can be understood as such only once a process of world-building has begun and key dimensions of forgiveness are already stabilized through mutual recognition and respect. 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.

When Aimee answers ‘yes’ to Berta, her affirmation is anchored in the world they are building together, one in which a shared moral understanding has gained a secure-enough foothold, despite appropriate and lingering fears.

It is important to emphasize that shared world-building is necessary but not sufficient for forgiveness. Not all community integration reveals emergent forgiveness; sometimes there is merely appeasement, acceptance, or letting go. To the question ‘Have you forgiven me?’ the answer might be either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The emergent view explains how ‘yes’ is possible, even in the absence of a concerted effort or explicit decision to achieve forgiveness, and outside a transactional model. Francine Niyitegeka’s remarks, quoted at the outset of this article, about trimming thorn-bushes, teaching school, tending to the sick and selling beans in the market, mention actions that can all take place in the absence of forgiveness. Survivors and perpetrators can live and work side by side, establishing a basic normative order but without yet generating a shared moral identity, let alone a moral order in which persons are respected as such. A shared moral order in which the survivor’s moral status is acknowledged and secure sets the stage for forgiving, but forgiving involves rebuilding trust and taking a new stance toward the grievous actions. The survivor’s voice must be heard and validated. Francine’s remarks suggest that if the genocide is to be taught in books, it must be recognized *as* genocide; it must be recognized as the moral horror that it is.

The reaction of the imprisoned Hutu husbands indicates some challenges of this emergent normative development. The men were at first angry, saying that the Tutsi could not be trusted and were trying to trick the Hutu women. Their wives went back to Sister T and said: ‘The men need your help; they need to understand this process and the way things are now.’ Facing their husbands’ resistance, the Hutu women became more aware of the normative shifts they had experienced, and then sought ways to reinforce the changes for themselves, and ways to bring their husbands into the process. Sister T began to meet with the husbands in prison, but, until they were released, it was not possible for them to experience genuine connection to the emerging shared world of the women.

The Emergent Model holds that forgiveness can creep up on a person through a series of smaller practical and moral choices that do not aim at forgiving. This is a *transformative*, rather than cumulative, model; small choices, not themselves directed to forgiving, can lead to transformations in which the acknowledgement of wrongs and losses is integrated, gaining new and different meaning. Trust is rebuilt, slowly, as new norms and values are established in relationships and practices through which mutual respect and concern is realised.

We said earlier that one difference between the Classical model and the Emergent model concerns whether the survivor or victim undertakes

actions that are centrally aimed at forgiveness. Many normative phenomena are emergent in the sense we wish to convey here. Consider a much easier case, and a lighter example, to help to convey the structure of ‘emergence’: a series of practical dietary choices can become *living as* a vegetarian, and then suddenly one notices, saying ‘ah, I see, I am a vegetarian.’ In the ‘ah-ha’ moment, one notices that one has been *being* a vegetarian for a long time and undertakes a more explicit normative commitment under this more general description. The standards governing one’s choices, preferences, and relationships have shifted, little by little. As a person lives as a vegetarian, the burden of proof shifts as well, so that she comes to need a reason to eat meat rather than needing a reason to avoid it. Moving away from prevailing dietary norms of her culture, she embraces an alternative value system within which she lives. She may, slowly, come to identify with other vegetarians, whose vegetarian practices and commitments enrich and shore up her own. Similarly, the survivors in Sister T’s collective started a process, which incrementally grew into commitments to fuller relationships than were initially envisioned, so that slowly forgiveness emerged amongst them.³⁴

On a similarly lighter note, the Emergent model looks to developmental psychology for a metaphor for relations amongst those whose worlds have shattered apart from each other and now take steps toward reclaiming their own lives. Movement from solitude to parallel play to interactive play is a developmental process that begins in childhood but that we continue to traverse throughout our lives. Parallel play can ease us into interactive play. Children are building worlds as they grow. There is the world into which they are born and the norms they are striving to master, but there is also the process of self-construction within that world, which involves an interactive modification of that world. Shared worlds tend to be constantly renegotiated, sometimes in small, imperceptible ways, sometimes in explicit, even explosive ways.

The slow, painstaking process of rebuilding oneself and one’s world after grievous wrongs is in significant ways qualitatively different from the healthy childhood process, to be sure. Yet it embodies a basic pattern of human sociality and growth in the ongoing process of continually renegotiated forms of interdependency that, with success, can yield relationships marked by significant mutuality.

6. Brave New Worlds

On the Emergent model, the practical and moral work of rebuilding a world creates patterns of interaction that make forgiveness possible and constitute its slow emergence, through small extensions of trust, and growing mutual awareness and curiosity, understanding and respect. Significant opportunities for change and growth must be possible – for the perpetrator, the victim, and the circumstances in which they live. Both parties must be

brave. The perpetrator must face his own horrible actions, taking responsibility while moving forward into a more morally acceptable state. The survivor must be willing to seek moral recognition, understanding and respect from someone who committed grave crimes against her. Perhaps, with Aristotle, we must find the line between bravery and foolhardiness. Emergent forgiveness emphasizes the gradual growth of trust and hopefulness' while also recognizing the need for wariness. It is no accident that Sister T's collective began with women who, though in many cases complicit, were not the primary perpetrators of genocide. Facing the perpetrators was a later and risky stage in the process. This brave and painstaking work of building a shared world constitutes a process in which forgiveness can emerge.

The world-building dimension of forgiving in the wake of grave wrong tends to be obscured by thinking of forgiveness as a decision located discretely in space and time, changing the moral map. This is not, however, to deny that the elements of a complex and negotiated apology might contribute significantly to emergent forgiveness. In cases of world-shattering harm, it is not possible for forgiveness to be achieved directly through temporally discrete reparative acts and moral transactions, such as the call and response of 'Please forgive me' and the (seemingly) performative utterance 'you are forgiven.' Because such acts are largely symbolic, they can at most fortify a process of forgiveness already solidly underway. Emergent forgiveness is not realized through a direct decision to forgive, but through a complex set of actions and conditions, the completion of which may make the utterance of such a speech act anti-climactic, even if symbolically significant.

Of course speech and other actions intertwine in constructing new norms and practices; the strength and security of these new norms depend upon the degree to which speech and other actions mutually reinforce each other. Speaking and being heard are crucial aspects of personhood, and the validation that one receives when one's testimony is understood and appreciated reinforces the mutuality of the process of speaking-with, of living together, of sharing a world.

Fragile worlds are marked by dissonances amongst norms, speech acts, and actions of the body; such dissonances render the world unpredictable, unintelligible, and relationships untrustworthy. Generating reliable interpretive frameworks is crucial to building confidence, trust and hope. The survivor's moral status must be protected by a broader world, a world through which and in which shared moral stability is emerging. Until the survivor's moral risk is minimized by being collectively borne, forgiveness will not emerge. Walker writes:

If no wrongs can be fully righted as no bell can be unrung,
there is still plenty of room for reparative gestures that

work on the moral plane to relieve suffering, disillusionment, isolation, and despair. Too little is better than nothing, and small gestures can carry larger meanings or can be a starting point for a broader reconsideration of relationships between individuals and within societies.³⁵

Rituals and gestures of apology and reparation – transactions between wrongdoers and those wronged – can stabilize and reinforce conditions in which forgiveness emerges. Nevertheless, their function in doing so depends on prior, ongoing, significant moral repair; their expressive success rides atop an already evolving moral world in which forgiving has taken root.

Although we have written as if emergent forgiveness asks each party to apprehend the reality of the other, we wish to emphasize that there is need for circumspection here. If forgiving requires mutual recognition, such that survivors and perpetrators alike come to see themselves through the eyes of the other, it is fraught with risk. Perpetrators have viewed their victims through eyes of hatred and contempt and may continue to do so. Adalbert Munzigura, a Rwandan génocidaire, offers a negative assessment of the prospect of mutual recognition, understanding, and empathy, between killers and survivors, saying:

There are people in Kibungo who will be able to understand me, but only those who plied their machetes like me or more than me. The Tutsis, though – it's unthinkable for them to learn and understand. *You just can't ask them to see our actions as we did.* I believe their suffering will reject any kind of explanation. What we have done is unnatural to them. Perhaps patience and forgetting will win out; perhaps not.³⁶

To be able to forgive, Adalbert suggests, the survivor would have to see the perpetrator's actions through the perpetrator's perspective. Adalbert believes this is likely to be impossible and, moreover, something we must not ask of a survivor. To be sure, such understanding risks further psychological damage and suffering for a survivor. Two questions loom here: How much does a survivor need to understand about the perpetrator in order to begin reasonably to trust, and, ultimately, to forgive? Just what will coming to sufficient understanding require of a survivor? These are questions for which there are no clear or simple answers.

Ideally, world-building allows the survivor and perpetrator slowly to develop empathy for each other. Empathy can promote mutual understanding and, when conditions are right, can serve the emergence of mutual recognition. Empathy can bring the personhood of the survivor into the heart

of the perpetrator's understanding of her; this is stronger than mere acknowledgement and, if conveyed effectively, can strengthen the process of, and ground for, forgiveness. On the other side, the survivor who seeks to understand who the perpetrator is and how he could have done what he did will likely need to engage empathically with the perpetrator. Yet survivor empathy must be properly bounded, for there is great risk of moral compromise and of damaging identification with the perpetrator – absorption in, or internalisation of, a perpetrator's degrading view of his victims.³⁷

In forgiving, the survivor has to, at the very least, see the perpetrator as a *person* rather than a *monster*, that is, as capable of sharing in a moral order, in spite of what he or she has done. The survivor must not be burdened with the task of the perpetrator's moral transformation, but without that moral transformation, a shared moral world will not develop.

Asking for empathy on the part of a survivor – even properly bounded, morally healthy empathy – may be asking for too much. Perpetrators often resist acknowledging the harm they inflicted, the moral norms they violated, underestimating the full gravity of the wrongs they have committed. Shame and dissociation are obstacles to moral repair. Empathy poses moral risk if a failure of recognition persists on the part of the perpetrator. Forgiving is not always possible and not always desirable. Sometimes the practical, psychological, and moral perils for the survivor are too great, the obstacles impossible to overcome.

We have urged that in cases of grave moral wrongs, forms of emergent forgiveness make meaningful gestures and rituals of apology possible. Emergent forgiveness is also, in such cases, the most cautious, prudent, and ultimately stable form of forgiving. It is not a simple moral transaction or set of transactions aimed at achieving forgiveness, nor is it located in performative utterances that in and of themselves reconstitute moral relations. Emergent forgiveness is, rather, a slow constructive process of ongoing re-engagement in small ways, often in practical matters, that may add up to significant moral and normative re-construction. Practical realignment of relationships can open the door to moral growth that at an earlier stage may not be possible. Through world-building, survivors bravely shape a future in which they can be whole and healthy. When that world-building is done with the perpetrator, there is a chance for forgiveness. When it cannot safely be done with the perpetrator, there is no shared world for them. Archbishop Desmond Tutu says: '*Forgiveness is not some nebulous thing. It is practical politics. Without forgiveness, there is no future.*'³⁸ We hold that the practical politics of world-building constructs the future that sometimes brings about a safe and secure forgiveness.

Notes

¹ J Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Other Press, New York, NY, 2006, p.42.

² J Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY, 2005, pp. 206-7.

³ Our focus on the Rwandan genocide is inspired by the work that one of us (LT) is doing with Rwandan refugees in Boston and her ongoing research motivated by a need to understand their situation and the very meaning of their survival.

⁴ C Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.47.

⁵ We see this Classical model as the standard account now being developed by most contemporary philosophers addressing forgiveness, but it is developed very clearly in Griswold, who, like Walker, emphasizes that forgiveness is a process, but who also emphasizes the offender's request for forgiveness, and the victim's decision to forgive or not to forgive based on a judgment of a variety of criteria. Although forgiveness might often result from an explicit decision to forgive, even on the Classical model this can be implicit.

⁶ The classical model would fit an explicit 'I forgive you,' as said in the Gacaca courts when a survivor meets the person who killed her entire family, but we know that often such statements are not freely made. The duress is significant. We know of no account of forgiveness that holds that a statement that one forgives, uttered under duress, or as a result of other forms of pressure or coercion, counts as forgiving.

⁷ C Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.47.

⁸ For a distinction between 'reliance' (which is not normative) and 'trust' (which is normative, linking reliance to responsibility) see M.U. Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 79-85. On our view, reliance would develop into trust only if the parties are members of a shared moral world.

⁹ J Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Other Press, New York, NY, 2006, pp.173-4.

¹⁰ M U Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 19. See also Lazare, *On Apology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹¹ See, e.g., C Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp.47-53, and 174.

¹² Margaret Walker's view of forgiveness is complex, and seems to straddle the Classical view and our Emergent Model, for she holds that forgiveness 'is a variable human process and a practice with culturally distinctive versions,' and yet she treats it as a decision. M.U. Walker, 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 152. See 153 for her emphasis on decisions.

¹³ L Tirrell, 'Apology, Promises, and the Politics of Reconciliation,' presented to 'Pathways to Reconciliation and Global Human Rights', Sarajevo 2005, sponsored by the United Nations Development Program in BiH, and The Globalism Institute of RMIT, AUS.

¹⁴ P Hieronimi, 'Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 62, No. 3, May 2001, p.530. Also see C Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p.79.

¹⁵ Darryl Li explains that in Rwanda, 'mass violence relied on social intimacy. Systematic identification and pursuit of Tutsi depended on the compilation of comprehensive lists at the local level; such surveillance, coupled with movement restrictions, made escape and anonymity extremely difficult. Moreover, the killing involved widespread denunciation and betrayal of friends, neighbours, and loved ones.' D. Li, 'Echoes of Violence: Considerations on Radio and genocide in Rwanda,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6 (1), 2004, p.10.

¹⁶ E Neuffer. *The Key to My Neighbor's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda*. Picador, New York, NY, 2002, p.251.

¹⁷ Walker eloquently articulates the important role in moral repair and survivor healing of giving voice to the moral damage done, and having one's experience of moral violation validated by others. (Margaret Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.) The importance of such articulation and validation is also explained in Maria Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, 'Have We Got a Theory For You: Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'the Woman's Voice',' in *Women's Studies International Forum* vol. 6, no.6, 1983, pp. 573-581.

¹⁸ J Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Other Press, New York, NY, 2006, p.116.

¹⁹ . Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Other Press, New York, NY, 2006, p.117.

²⁰ J Hatzfeld, *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda After the Genocide*, translation: Linda Coverdale, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2009, p.7.

²¹ J Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Other Press, New York, NY, 2006, pp.217-218.

²² S Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. Schocken Books, New York, NY, 1998, p.9.

²³ C F Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p.176.

²⁴ C F Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p.176.

²⁵ C F Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p.176.

²⁶ Even in more individualized atrocities, like sustained domestic assault, cohabitation may also be a social or economic reality.

²⁷ M U Walker, 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 28.

²⁸ But see C Card, 'Rape Terrorism' in *The Unnatural Lottery: Character and Moral Luck*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1997, p. 97-117. Rape is complex, because the degree of world-shattering can be so variable.

²⁹ J Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, The Free Press, New York, NY, 1995.

³⁰ 'Normative repair' encompasses 'moral repair' but not vice-versa. Community norms include moral norms, but also include social and political norms that are not moral. Thus, on our view, moral repair can emerge from non-moral normative repair.

³¹ See, for example, I. Ilibagiza, and S. Erwin. *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Genocide*, Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2006, pp. 96-98, 134.

³² John Searle develops a compelling account of collective consciousness in *The Construction of Social Reality*, NY: The Free Press, 1995.)

³³ We are grateful to Fr. Romain Rurangirwa for an account of these events. We take responsibility for the presentation here.

³⁴ This story is about world-building amongst women, who were neither the primary agents of the genocide nor bystanders. In general, the Hutu women stayed in their traditional roles, serving their men. Rwandan prisons contained approximately 3,000 women perpetrators, out of 100,000 prisoners overall. The Tutsi women, on the other hand, were among the primary targets; most were murdered, but among survivors over 80% suffered rape once or many times. So there is an asymmetry. Crucial to this story, however, is that the Tutsi women recognized shared oppression and reached out to the Hutu women across their differences, undertaking personal risk to express compassion. Also crucial is the absence of the men. As Nicole Itano reported in 2002: 'Hutu and Tutsi women in some areas have bonded together to shoulder the responsibility of caring for the thousands of genocide orphans, yet such cooperation has been made possible by the absence of the genocide's

worst perpetrators.' This was just before a massive release of prisoners, which would radically alter the sense of background safety. N. Itano, '3,000 Rwandan Women Await Trials for Genocide' Women's e-News, 12/20/02. <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=1152>

³⁵ M U Walker, 2006. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 37.

³⁶ J Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, translation: Linda Coverdale, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY, 2005, p. 194. Emphasis added.

³⁷ See A Carse 'The Moral Contours of Empathy,' *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 8, 2005, pp.169-195.

³⁸ Desmond Tutu, in S Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, Schocken Books, New York, NY,1998, p. 268.

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