Collective Forgiveness

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This chapter considers the possibility and ethics of collective forgiveness. I begin by distinguishing between different forms of forgiveness to illustrate what it might look like for a collective to forgive that is distinct from the individual and group-based forgiveness of its members. I then consider how emotional models of forgiveness might capture the phenomenon of collective forgiveness. I argue that shortcomings with emotional models suggest that performative and social practice models of forgiveness more plausibly extend to collective forgiveness. I close by exploring a range of moral questions and objections to practices of collective forgiveness.

1. Introduction[1]

In 2008, Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada at the time, publicly apologized to Indigenous peoples in Canada for the Indian Residential School System that forced over 150,000 Inuit, First Nations, and Métis children into boarding schools which were explicitly designed to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture and erase Indigenous cultures, spiritual practices, and ways of life. In his apology, Harper stated: "the government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks forgiveness of the Aboriginal people of this country for failing them so profoundly. We are sorry." Five Indigenous leaders and six residential school survivors were present but none of them explicitly offered forgiveness (Government of Canada 2008; Changfoot 2020). On June 11-13, 2010, Chief Kenny Blacksmith, a residential school survivor and former Deputy Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees in Quebec, held a "National Forgiven Summit" in Ottawa following a months-long "Journey of Freedom" across the nation through which Blacksmith advocated forgiveness across Indigenous communities. A few thousand people attended the summit at which a "Charter of Forgiveness" was presented to Federal Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl signed by elders, survivors, and Indigenous youth (CBC News 2010; Rushdy 2018: 267; Changfoot 2020).

Ashraf H.A. Rushdy (2018) argues that because each individual who forgave at the summit decided to forgive personally, the National Forgiven Summit is not a case of collective forgiveness. More strongly, he suggests that "there is, as of yet, no such thing as a clearly discernible act of collective public forgiveness in the same way as there is such a thing as an act of collective public apology" (Rushdy 2018: 264). On Rushdy's view, for collective forgiveness to take place, there must be "a collective, public forgiveness on behalf of the population" (Rushdy 2018: 267). Collective forgiveness in the Canadian context would thus consist in forgiveness on behalf of *all* Indigenous people in Canada for the Indian Residential School System. But this has obviously not happened, and the forgiveness offered at the National Forgiven Summit was itself extremely controversial. It was, for example, criticized by Indigenous people who found the National Forgiven Summit insulting to residential school survivors (e.g., Windspeaker 2010). Many scholars have also pointed out that colonialism is not in the country's past, and so forgiveness in this context is inappropriate (MacLachlan 2012; Coulthard 2014; Flowers 2015).

Does collective forgiveness require that all members of a social group harmed by injustice forgive? If it does, then Rushdy is likely right that collective forgiveness is at least quite rare. But answering this question requires addressing a number of philosophical questions about the nature of collectives and the nature of forgiveness. What is a collective? And if a collective were to forgive, what would their forgiveness look like? This chapter addresses these questions. I begin by distinguishing between different forms of forgiveness in response to injustices that harm many different people: individual forgiveness, group-based forgiveness, and collective forgiveness. I suggest that *individual forgiveness* takes place when one individual forgives for a wrongful act or injustice done to them personally. *Group-based forgiveness* takes place when an individual (or multiple individuals) forgives for a wrongful act or injustice done to a social group to which they belong (e.g., Indigenous people forgiving acts of colonial violence or disabled people forgiving ableist acts). *Collective forgiveness* takes place when the entity forgiving is a group itself. I then consider how some prominent views about the nature of forgiveness might extend to capture the phenomenon of collective forgiveness. I show that problems with widely popular emotional models of collective forgiveness lead us toward a more performative, social practice model of collective forgiveness. I close by reflecting on the ethics of collective forgiveness, returning to the case of the National Forgiven Summit, and then considering more broadly the ethics of *political* collective forgiveness.

2. Individual, Group-Based, and Collective Forgiveness

The question of collective forgiveness arises because it is often the case that wrongful acts and injustices harm a great many people. Scholars have considered the nature and role of forgiveness in contexts such as the Holocaust (Minow 1998; Brudholm and Rosoux 2009), the Rwandan Genocide (Tutu 2000; Brudholm and Rosoux 2009; Carse and Tirrell 2010; Mukashema and Mullet 2013) and Apartheid in South Africa (Minow 1998; Tutu 2000; Govier 2002; Bennett 2003; Walker 2006). But there has been less discussion of what it might look like for Jews, Tutsis, or Black South Africans to come together and forgive as collectives, rather than as individual victims. My strategy will be to construct a case in which it seems, intuitively, as though a collective has offered forgiveness that is distinct from both the individual and group-based forgiveness of its members. We will then be better positioned to address questions about the possibility of collective forgiveness in these more complicated political contexts.

Suppose that multiple women university students come forward with sexual harassment allegations against a campus fraternity, Iota Alpha. Norah, Tiffany, and Maria all publicly share credible stories about having been victims of sexual harassment by fraternity members. An environmental assessment of Iota Alpha reveals that "there is a climate of sexism and misogyny endemic to the group," and the fraternity is suspended as punishment. Although each of these women are direct victims of serious moral wrongs done to them as individuals, there is an important sense in which all women on campus are harmed by Iota Alpha, to varying degrees and depending on other aspects of their identities and closeness to the event. The fraternity's sexist and misogynistic culture is part of an unjust patriarchal society, and so it makes sense to say that *women* (not just direct victims of sexual harassment) have reason to resent Iota Alpha for their behavior (see Stockdale 2013). And if women can reasonably resent, then perhaps women (as a social group) can also forgive.

It is not difficult to imagine Norah, Tiffany, and Maria forgiving Iota Alpha as individuals in this case. Suppose that Iota Alpha responds by accepting full responsibility for the climate of misogyny and sexism they have promoted and issue a public apology in the campus newspaper on behalf of the group, committing to changing the fraternity's culture going forward. Norah, Tiffany, and Maria – after working through their emotions with therapists individually – each decide to forgive Iota Alpha as well as the particular fraternity members who sexually harassed them. Their

forgiveness is *individual* because each woman personally forgave the fraternity (and its members) for the harm done directly to them as women who were victimized at Iota Alpha's parties.

We can also imagine other women experiencing resentment and forgiveness *as women* in this case: that is, group-based forgiveness as members of the social group harmed by the injustice. Even women students who had not once attended a party at Iota Alpha might reasonably point out that they resent the group for its contribution to the systemic harms of misogyny and sexism on campus that they, too, endure as women students in daily life. But they also note that, due to Iota Alpha's subsequent actions which show a change in the group's culture, they have personally decided to forgive the fraternity. These women's forgiveness is *group-based*, that is, it is forgiveness of Iota Alpha for the harm done to them as women, and not any individual in particular.

But it does not yet seem as though there is reason to think that collective forgiveness has taken place, since many individual women forgiving Iota Alpha on their own terms (for individual and group-based reasons) is not the same as a collective forgiving itself (Rushdy 2018). Trudy Govier (2002) considers what it would take for a collective to forgive. She points out that collectives (as a *form* of social group) have qualities that are logically distinct from their individual members. Importantly, they have formal organizational structures, which enable them to make decisions and undertake actions together (Govier 2002: 86). For example, an environmental group might have a ten-member executive that is elected by group members and authorized to make decisions and undertake actions on behalf of the group, which might consist of thousands of individual members. Through discussion to determine the group's beliefs and goals, and its formal decision-making procedure, the group might make an executive decision to campaign against a development proposal – a *collective* decision not reducible to the decisions of individual members (Govier 2002). So while an environmental group constitutes a collective, "women" as a social group does not. There is no organizational structure to the social group "women" or even "women on campus" that enables them to determine the group's beliefs and goals, and to act as a group. Thus, multiple women's forgiveness of Iota Alpha does not constitute collective forgiveness.

But suppose that an emotional support group is formed called *Sexism Survivors on Campus*. Members meet regularly to share their experiences, hurt feelings, and concerns about sexism and misogyny across campus. After months of meeting to work through their thoughts and emotions, and after witnessing Iota Alpha's genuine shift in culture, the question of forgiveness arises. Norah is present, and she remarks that she is ready to forgive Iota Alpha and inquires what her group

members are thinking. Tiffany and Maria remark that they, too, think that the fraternity's genuine remorse, apology, and subsequent actions warrant forgiveness. Most other women agree, and they collaboratively discuss a formal voting procedure to determine whether the group should forgive. Almost all members vote "yes," with two group members voting "no." In line with their procedure for determining the votes required for a collective decision, the group decides that they are ready to forgive Iota Alpha. They arrange a meeting with Iota Alpha where Norah says, on behalf of the group, "we forgive you." Fraternity members express gratitude for what they see as a supererogatory act of forgiveness. Following the meeting, *Sexism Survivors on Campus* publishes an open letter in the campus newspaper explaining the group's reasons for forgiveness and re-stating their commitment to ending sexism and misogyny across campus.

There are many questions related to this case of what might plausibly be described as collective forgiveness. For example, we might ask whether it makes sense to hold a collective responsible for its actions (or just its individual members), whether the fraternity's behavior actually warrants forgiveness, and who has the moral standing to forgive (direct victims, women on campus, or even women everywhere?). Some people may disagree with women's decisions to offer individual and group-based forgiveness, and with *Sexism Survivors on Campus'* decision to forgive. But setting these questions aside, there seems to be an important sense in which it makes sense to say that *Sexism Survivors on Campus* forgave Iota Alpha, not just that its individual members forgave the group (and not all of them did). This is because the readiness to forgive, and the act of forgiveness, was brought about by procedures, reasoning, and actions of a *collective.*

This case illustrates that collective forgiveness is distinct from both individual and group-based forgiveness. It is not enough for multiple women on campus to forgive Iota Alpha on their own terms for collective forgiveness to take place, even if all of them do. This is because their forgiveness would not necessarily be forgiveness *of* a collective. As Claudia Card argues, "group [collective] forgiveness is not simply reducible to members of one group forgiving members of another" (Card 2002: 10). Collective forgiveness is a form of forgiveness offered by a collective itself, and it can be genuinely offered even if not all members of the collective agree with the group's decision to forgive. If this is right, then we have reasons to resist the idea that collective forgiveness for the Canadian Indian Residential School System would require all Indigenous Canadians to forgive. In fact, in the absence of an official, recognized body with the authority to

represent all Indigenous people in Canada, it does not seem as though "Indigenous Canadians" constitute a collective with a mechanism through which collective forgiveness could be offered.

But what *is* collective forgiveness*?* It is, importantly, not the same thing as political forgiveness (even if the cases discussed so far count as political forgiveness). For example, it is possible that collective anger and forgiveness might occur between sports teams during a tournament. If the Boston Bruins play dirty, the Montreal Canadiens might resent the Boston Bruins for their actions. But if the Boston Bruins apologize for their collective actions that amount to unfair play on the ice, the Montreal Canadiens might, as a team, forgive them. I take it that the forgiveness in this scenario could plausibly be construed as collective, even if it is not obviously political (see also MacLachlan 2012). By the same token, some instances of political forgiveness are individual. For example, if a protestor at a political rally screams a hateful message at the politician, and if they subsequently apologize to the politician on social media, the politician's forgiveness might be *political* forgiveness (e.g., because it's politically motivated) even if not collective. So, although many instances of collective forgiveness might also be political forgiveness, it is important not to conflate the two.

In what follows, I consider how some prominent views of the nature of individual forgiveness might extend to capture the phenomenon of collective forgiveness. I begin with widely popular emotional models of forgiveness.

3. Emotional Models of Collective Forgiveness

On emotional models of individual forgiveness, forgiveness takes place when a person experiences a change in emotion from resentment or other hostile feelings toward a wrongdoer (e.g., Strawson 1962; Murphy 1982; Roberts 1995; Hieronymi 2001; Griswold 2007; Allais 2008). As Jeffrie G. Murphy puts it, forgiveness is "primarily a matter of how I *feel* about you" (Murphy 1982: 506, emphasis added). It is a process by which victims of wrongful acts undergo a change of heart, and typically for a moral reason. Unlike excusing, justifying, or explaining away a wrongdoer's behavior that might lead to a diminishing of hostile feelings, and unlike merely extinguishing resentment for therapeutic reasons, forgiveness consists in a commitment to overcome hostile feelings toward the wrongdoer because the reasons for these hostile feelings have been undermined. For example, when we resent another person, our resentment signifies self-respect. It signifies that we see ourselves as deserving of some degree of good will or benevolence from

others, and that the wrongdoer has not afforded us that treatment. But when a wrongdoer apologizes and displays remorse for an action, and when he commits to changing his ways for the future, there are no longer reasons to resent him. Such things as apology and remorse constitute moral reasons to forgive, replacing hostile feelings with friendlier ones.

There is disagreement about which positive feelings toward the wrongdoer replace hostile feelings when we forgive. David Novitz argues that forgiveness requires replacing negative feelings toward the wrongdoer with "empathetic thinking" (Novitz 1998: 309) whereas Martin Hughes talks of "friendly attitudes" more generally (Hughes 1975). David McNaughton and Eve Garrard argue that forgiveness consists in replacing hostile feelings with good will (McNaughton and Garrard 2019). There is also disagreement about whether resentment must precede forgiveness, or whether forgiveness consists in the forswearing of other hostile or hurt feelings as well (Walker 2006; MacLachlan 2009; Pettigrove 2012). The important point for our purposes is that, on emotional models of forgiveness, those who are harmed by wrongful acts undergo a change of heart, forswearing hostile feelings toward the wrongdoer and replacing them with more friendly or positive feelings toward them.

How might an emotional model of forgiveness make sense of collective forgiveness? One potential theory of collective emotional forgiveness is the *joint commitment account*. Margaret Gilbert has recently proposed what she refers to as the "joint commitment account of collective emotion" (Gilbert 2014: 23). Joint commitments, on Gilbert's view, are formed when people express their readiness to commit, as one, to a cause. For example, I might be personally committed to social justice. But if I express a readiness (verbally or through other behavior) to commit alongside others to a social justice pursuit, I contribute to the formation of a joint commitment to the pursuit of social justice. Once a joint commitment has been established, each person is individually committed to doing their part to carry out the joint commitment and responsible for doing so. Group members are thus bound by an "obligation criterion" through which they have the standing to rebuke one another if they fail to behave in the "spirit of the collective emotion" (Gilbert 2014: 23). No one person can rescind a joint commitment, either. Doing so requires cooperation amongst group members (Gilbert 2014: 24).

Gilbert extends her view to collective emotions as follows:

Persons X, Y, and so on, (or: members of a population P) are collectively E if and only if they are jointly committed to be E as a body.

So, on this view, a collective emotion is an emotion to which members of a collective are jointly committed. In other words, "the parties are jointly committed to emulate, by virtue of their several actions and utterances, a single subject of the emotion in question, in relevant circumstances" (Gilbert 2014: 25). Gilbert uses the example of excitement to illustrate, where three people are excited about their friend, Stella, winning an award. If Alice, in conversation, angrily blurts out frustration about Stella winning yet another reward, such an expression would betray the collective excitement. Other friends in the group might feel that Alice is doing something wrong and rebuke her for her behavior (Gilbert 2014: 23). To fulfill her responsibility to participate in collective excitement for Stella, Alice must *show* excitement through her "public performance" of the emotion (Gilbert 2014: 25). This does not mean that Alice must be personally excited about Stella winning an award, but that she is committed to showing excitement as part of a collective (i.e., the friend group) that is collectively excited about Stella's success.

How might a joint commitment theory of collective emotion make sense of the collective forgiveness of *Sexism Survivors on Campus*? On Gilbert's view:

> Norah, Tiffany, Maria, and so on, (or: members of *Sexism Survivors on Campus*) collectively forgive Iota Alpha if and only if they are jointly committed to forgive.

On this account, collective forgiveness is an emotion to which members of a collective are jointly committed. To carry out collective forgiveness, Norah, Tiffany, Maria, and other members must emulate, in relevant contexts, expressions of forgiveness. For example, members of *Sexism Survivors on Campus* might emulate forgiveness by smiling at fraternity members if they walk by them on campus, talking about the group sympathetically, and resisting hostile feelings toward the fraternity when they arise. The commitment to emulate friendly feelings, on this account, captures the common idea that forgiveness is partly constituted by a commitment to rejecting hostile feelings toward the wrongdoer that may arise moving forward (Walker 2006: 157; Pettigrove 2012: 18). If Maria, in conversation, angrily blurts out that maybe *Sexism Survivors on Campus* should continue to hate Iota Alpha after all, other members might feel that Maria is doing something wrong and rebuke her for her angry expression. "We have forgiven them, remember?" they might ask, reminding Maria that she must display forgiving rather than hostile feelings as a participant of the group's collective forgiveness.

There are several virtues of a joint commitment theory of collective forgiveness. First, it captures the intuitive difference between group-based and collective forgiveness, where forgiving

a wrongful act for the harm done to me as a woman is not the same thing as a collective of women forgiving. Second, the account does not require group members to have succeeded in extinguishing all of their hostile feelings and replacing them with friendlier ones for the group to forgive. As Gilbert argues, the idea of publicly performing the emotion "indicates that *what goes on in each mind and heart* is not at issue with respect to what the parties are committed to" (Gilbert 2014: 25). Glen Pettigrove and Nigel Parsons similarly suggest that "it is possible for a group to forgive wrongs that were suffered as a group, even though some members of the group do not forgive what they suffered as individuals" (Pettigrove and Parsons 2010: 678). Maria might continue to harbor resentment toward members of Iota Alpha for their sexual harassment of her, as a direct victim, even though she is jointly committed to forgiving Iota Alpha as a member of *Sexism Survivors on Campus* and to emulating, through her behavior, a "single subject of the emotion in question" (Gilbert 2014: 25). She might, too, be personally committed to overcoming her own hostile feelings toward fraternity members so that she can *individually* forgive them. But this is a separate matter from her participation in the collective forgiveness.

There are, however, some disadvantages of a joint commitment account of collective forgiveness. One is the obligation criterion. The idea that a collective emotion generates obligations on the part of group members to emulate the emotion in their own individual behavior runs the risk of dismissing, or encouraging suppression of, individuals' genuine emotional experiences about injustices that harm them. For example, those who voted "no" to *Sexism Survivors on Campus*'s decision to forgive may be forced to either leave the group or accept their obligation to emulate the group's forgiveness. And this choice situation itself can be harmful to victims who are already struggling to cope with injustice. Notice, too, that although it is possible for members to leave *Sexism Survivors on Campus* if they choose to, there will be many cases in which leaving a collective is very difficult, if not impossible (e.g., if we accept that at least many whole nations are collectives). And since forgiveness is often thought to provide release for victims of injustice, not further burdens, a theory of collective forgiveness according to which some individuals are harmed by forgiveness might seem implausible.

Glen Pettigrove (2006) raises a further concern about representatives of a collective offering forgiveness on behalf of the collective, since one might worry that representatives do not have the authority or ability to commit their members not to act from particular emotions, such as when a representative of a nation offers forgiveness on behalf of citizens. But he argues that there

is nothing "in principle" problematic about this, noting that legal systems do regulate citizens' emotions (e.g., through laws against acts motivated by hatred) (Pettigrove 2006: 492-43). Another response is that, although the obligation criterion might very well be problematic for moral and political reasons, it is this requirement of genuinely collective forgiveness that makes sense of our hesitation about practices of collective forgiveness. I return to these concerns in the final section.

Proponents of the emotional model might also avoid some of these problems by defending an account on collective forgiveness that is less burdensome on group members' expressions of emotion than Gilbert's joint commitment account. For example, they might defend a view on which collective forgiveness consists not in a group's positive commitment to emulating a particular emotion, but in a group's decision to no longer be committed to hostile feelings as a defining feature of membership in the group (see Parsons and Pettigrove 2012: 512). On this view, *Sexism Survivors on Campus* would still be committed to a change in emotional orientation toward Iota Alpha, but group members would not be obligated to emulate friendly feelings toward the fraternity. This weaker view does come at a cost, however. It is not clear that no longer being committed to resent Iota Alpha is enough to count as *forgiveness*. In other words, it may be that the stronger sense of commitment to emotional change (e.g., emulating friendly feelings, a public commitment to those feelings, uttering "I forgive you" as an expression of them) is what makes the joint commitment emotional model a plausible theory of collective forgiveness.

But one might also worry that, on a joint commitment account of collective forgiveness, collective emotions look more like a commitment to acting in certain ways rather than a commitment to having a genuinely collective *emotion.* Theories of collective emotion which recognize the role of *affect* in collective emotional experiences seem to fare better in capturing the felt experience of collective emotions and how they are constituted by the emotions of individuals. For example, Michael S. Brady (2016) defends an account of collective anger where the collective emotion involves, or is at least partly constituted by, the anger of individuals. He provides the example of students' collective anger at a 2011 protest in London in response to the government's proposal to increase tuition fees. Individual students present were angry about the spike in tuition fees, and they were *aware* that others present were angry as well. The combined experience of each individual student's anger along with their awareness of others' anger led, in this scenario, to an emotional contagion of anger that stretched across the group. As Dario Páez and Bernard Rimé (2014) argue, collective emotions come about when individuals' gestures, movements, and speech

result in "an atmosphere of emotion and fervor" which transforms individual emotional feelings into shared emotional feelings (Páez and Rimé 2014: 207). These shared emotional feelings, along with the experience of being in community with others, combine in such a way that "participants evolve to a sense of group membership" and "experience the 'we' in place of the 'I'" (207). Collective emotions, on this view, emerge from the collective experience of an emotion. In other words, what is collective about the emotion is not a joint commitment but the *emotional contagion*, which cannot be reduced to the emotional experience of any one member of the collective.

Collective forgiveness, on this sort of view, would be the forswearing of resentment and other hostile feelings, where members' own positive feelings toward the wrongdoer converge with those of others, producing collective forgiveness. And this view might get something right about collective forgiveness. If I witness others' readiness to forgive as well as their sympathetic, friendly attitudes toward a wrongdoer for their change of heart, I might feel myself experiencing forgiving attitudes, too. In the context of *Sexism Survivors on Campus*, group members' hostile feelings toward Iota Alpha might have plausibly softened in hearing others express how their own feelings were changing, and in hearing them articulate reasons for the group to forgive. (It's also plausible that expressions of hostile feelings on the part of individual members would strengthen the hostile feelings of others, contributing to collective anger.) On this view, collective forgiveness is not a commitment to forgiving, but rather an emotional convergence of the forswearing of hostile feelings toward the wrongdoer and the emergence of friendlier ones stretching across the group.

One disadvantage of the emotional convergence account of collective forgiveness is that it does away with joint commitment altogether. People's emotional experiences converge with those of others, but there is no decision-making process that results in a collective decision to undergo a change in emotional orientation toward the wrongdoer(s). In fact, an emotional episode of collective forgiveness can take place just by being in the same room as others. This account of collective forgiveness therefore leaves us without resources for making sense of the processes by which collectives decide to forgive and to display acts of forgiveness. It is, after all, *Sexism Survivors on Campus'* collaborative decision-making process by which they decided to change their attitudes and behavior toward Iota Alpha, the utterance "we forgive you," and the open letter publicly documenting their forgiveness that seem central to what establishes collective forgiveness in this case. As Alice MacLachlan argues, focusing on the emotional dimensions of forgiveness risks overlooking or even undermining "the ritualistic, behavioural, and even pragmatic elements

of forgiveness… [the wrongdoer's] being 'let back in' may be as much a matter of social gesture as it is a matter of deep emotional transformation" (MacLachlan 2009: 189).

In what follows, I explore how performative and social practice models of forgiveness, which decenter (but do not eliminate entirely) the role of emotional experience in forgiveness are more capable of preserving the virtues of emotional models of forgiveness without their problems.

4. Performative and Social Practice Models

Two features of *Sexism Survivors on Campus*'s forgiveness are left out of the emotional model of forgiveness according to which collective forgiveness is an emotional convergence of group members' forgiveness: namely, the expression "we forgive you" and the publication of an open letter declaring the group's forgiveness. Performative models of forgiveness do better to accommodate these features, while preserving the importance of the role of commitment to collective forgiveness. Following J.L. Austin (1972), to say "I forgive you" is a performative utterance that is itself an action (Haber 1991; Digeser 2001; Pettigrove 2012). On some performative views, merely saying "I forgive you" can *amount* to forgiveness (Neblett 1974), and so collective forgiveness would merely consist in a representative of a collective saying, "we forgive you." But most philosophers who defend performative views of forgiveness think that forgiveness requires more than just the utterance. For example, Joram Graf Haber argues that, when we offer forgiveness, our forgiveness implies that the wrongdoer is responsible for performing a wrongful act, that one was personally injured by the act and resents it, and that one has either succeeded or is working toward overcoming resentment (Haber 1991: 40).

Glen Pettigrove (2012) offers an alternative performative account of "commissive forgiving" that does not require the person to be *personally* injured by the wrongful act, and that admits of a wider range of hostile feelings toward the wrongdoer beyond resentment prior to forgiveness taking place. It is thus a more natural starting point for a performative theory of collective forgiveness than Haber's. On Pettigrove's view, the utterance "I forgive you" commits a person to a course of action which includes no longer retaliating, forswearing hostile attitudes, and offering goodwill toward the perpetrator (or at least the degree of benevolence one would have offered the person prior to the act of wrongdoing). It is thus possible to offer genuine forgiveness while still feeling angry about the wrongful act, as long as one commits to not acting from these hostile attitudes moving forward (Pettigrove 2012: 13). Kathryn J. Norlock (2009) similarly argues

that forgiveness is a moral act involving (1) the decision to take a new attitude toward the wrongdoer, which functions to release them from full blameworthiness, and (2) "the performative utterance to the wrongdoer of one's accomplishment of, or commitment to, the choices and actions that releasing them requires" (Norlock 2009: 97; see also Norlock forthcoming). Brandon Warmke (2016) adds that forgiveness as a communicative act has declarative force: it brings a new state of affairs into existence, whereby the norms between victims and wrongdoers have been altered. When forgiveness is offered, on Warmke's view, the wrongdoer is released from obligations (e.g., to repent), the victim gives up certain rights (e.g., to demand an apology or request restitution), and norms governing the relationship are changed moving forward (e.g., how the wrongdoer and victim ought to treat one another) (Warmke 2016; see also Bennett 2018).

How might a performative account of forgiveness capture cases of collective forgiveness? Prior to offering forgiveness, members of the collective would participate, through the collective's established structures, in discussion about whether the group is ready to forgive (as on the joint commitment emotional model). A representative, perhaps accompanied by other group members, would utter "*we* forgive you" where the utterance signifies a joint commitment to not retaliating, forswearing hostile attitudes, and offering goodwill or benevolence toward the wrongdoer. In collective contexts, these commitments would be carried out by the collective actions of the group. For example, *Sexism Survivors on Campus* might commit to stop demanding that Iota Alpha be shut down, or they might even publicly declare that their suspension should end. The group might also focus on creating space in their support group sessions to cultivate friendlier attitudes toward Iota Alpha, ending their practice of using group sessions to articulate and express hostile feelings.

This view might even be extended to highly complex cases of political forgiveness. For example, Glen Pettigrove and Nigel Parsons (2010) argue that Palestine's forgiveness of Israel in the future might be possible. They take the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to be a collective that could potentially be in a position to offer collective forgiveness of Israel, as a highly organized body with the authority to represent the Palestinian people. The authors argue that, through a formal decision-making procedure involving the perspectives of Palestinians, the PLO might collectively decide to forgive (Pettigrove and Parsons 2010: 676). For example, if a representative were to say "we forgive you," if the PLO altered institutional structures that dispose Palestinians to resent Israel, and if a significant number of Palestinians approve of these actions

and experience diminished resentment replaced by good will toward Israel, Pettigrove and Parsons argue that collective forgiveness would have taken place (Pettigrove and Parsons 2010: 677).

In the previous section, I suggested that one potential disadvantage of the joint commitment emotional model of forgiveness is the obligation criterion. In jointly committing to forgive, each member of the collective is responsible for emulating the collective's forgiveness in their own actions, and they are appropriate targets of rebuke by fellow group members when they fail to do so. Some performative models of forgiveness might actually endorse this criterion in the context of collective forgiveness as well. For example, on Warmke's (2016) view of forgiveness (which draws upon Gilbert's notion of personal commitment), forgivers are criticizable when they behave inconsistently with their forgiveness because, in offering forgiveness, the norms granting them the rights to blame, demand an apology, etc. have been altered. Christopher Bennett (2018) similarly endorses the idea that, in forgiving, forgivers take on obligations toward the wrongdoer. Thus, on at least some emotional and performative models of collective forgiveness, group members might be obligated to emulate forgiveness of the collective.

But a performative model of collective forgiveness need not endorse the obligation criterion (see also Wigura 2017: 20). As Margaret Urban Walker writes:

> Forgiveness as a moral commitment to a practical policy… can extend to cases of forgiveness by groups, including peoples or nations, where forgiveness is more easily seen as a commitment to proceed without continuing demands for repair even though individual feelings of members are not something one can fully assess or control. (Walker 2006: 157)

On a performative model of collective forgiveness, the group's commitment to forswear hostile attitudes and cultivate friendlier attitudes toward the perpetrator might instead be *promoted* or *fostered* (Watkins 2015; Enright et al 2016). Robert D. Enright et al (2016) suggest that promoting forgiveness is a *feature* of collective forgiveness. One way to foster forgiveness is through establishing and promoting norms and values, such as the norm supporting forgiveness and the values of peace and cooperation (Enright et al 2016: 159). Other strategies include issuing proclamations that foster forgiveness amongst group members (e.g., saying things like "we as a group do our best to lessen conflict…"), and showing gestures of good will toward wrongdoers. Leaders can also act as role models for forgiving, and they can both receive and offer forgiveness education (Enright et al 2016: 159-160). The authors suggest that the Amish community's response

to the killing of schoolchildren in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania is an example of collective forgiveness through which the community used its own decision-making processes and structure for collective action to express and demonstrate forgiveness of the offender (159).

Forgiveness, on this understanding, begins to look a lot like a multidimensional *social practice* (MacLachlan 2009; Norlock 2009). Beyond the important public aspect of communicating "we forgive you" to the wrongdoer, carrying out forgiveness involves a range of activities: from working through one's emotions, to treating the wrongdoer differently, to giving up demands for restitution, and so on. Alice MacLachlan (2009) defends a social practice model of forgiveness. She describes forgiveness as a happening and an action: something that takes place, and something that we do (MacLachlan 2009: 187). It is not primarily about how one person feels about another, and there is no one way that people forgive (see also Walker 2006: 153). Rather, there are a variety of *practices* of forgiveness, including overcoming hostile feelings, a change in belief about what the wrongdoer's action says about their character, refraining from retaliating, and offering words of forgiveness (MacLachlan 2009: 188). Whether one or more of these acts of forgiveness counts as genuine forgiveness will depend on the context. For example, offering words of forgiveness might be insufficient in complex family relationships in which there is longstanding conflict, and overcoming anger might be out of place in the case of very minor wrongs. The perspectives of those who offer and receive forgiveness also matter in determining what counts as forgiveness (MacLachlan 2009: 188). But MacLachlan argues that, through a variety of practices of forgiveness, victims of moral wrongdoing are able to achieve relief from the wrong and find themselves capable of coping moving forward. Drawing upon Card (2002), Walker (2006), and Hannah Arendt (1958), she emphasizes forward-looking aspects of forgiveness that are left out of emotional models which are focused on relinquishing hostile feelings. These scholars argue that forgiveness helps to repair or improve relationships through the restored values of trust and hope in others, and the presumption of goodwill and respect moving forward (MacLachlan 2009: 190).

Following Card and Walker, Alisa Carse and Lynne Tirrell (2010) draw upon survivors' testimony to explore the nature of forgiveness in the context of the Rwandan genocide. They argue that forgiveness is a long process through which survivors and perpetrators build a shared moral world in the aftermath of world-shattering harms. This process begins through cohabitation, followed by small gestures at reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect, empathy, and the slow establishment of trust (Carse and Tirrell 2010). The forgiveness process is not necessarily

linear, but "a multifaceted, complex, and often jagged process" (Carse and Tirrell 2010: 46). There is thus no particular moment that can be identified when individual survivors decide to forgive. Rather, forgiveness is emergent, taking place through the process of world-building and the cooperative actions of survivors and perpetrators who begin to relate to one another in new ways. In the Canadian context, Nadine Changfoot (2020) similarly suggests that "forgiveness borne of actions both ethical and socio-economic remains on the horizon, yet paradoxically, for forgiveness to occur, these actions are what would bring us closer to that horizon" (Changfoot 2020: 10).

An emergent model of forgiveness might capture instances of collective forgiveness that take place in the context of wide-reaching injustices such as genocide. For example, we can imagine a group of survivors who decide, together, to forgive a perpetrator or a group of perpetrators as they find themselves engaging in the emerging practices of forgiveness that Carse and Tirrell identify. They might see the collective offering of forgiveness as beneficial to this process, saying "we forgive you" to a perpetrator (or group of perpetrators) as a way of marking out and affirming their joint commitment to diminished hostile feelings, good will towards (at least some) perpetrators, and to continuing the collaborative work of establishing positive, trusting relations. Collective forgiveness, on an emergent view, would include a group of survivors' collective decision to forgive together. But the practices of forgiveness between survivors and perpetrators would already be taking place through the slow process of improved relations.

If we give up the search for one definition of forgiveness and admit that practices of forgiveness vary widely between contexts, the possibility of collective forgiveness might seem more within reach. Practices of collective forgiveness will vary depending on the victimized group's prior relationship to the individual or collective wrongdoer(s), the nature and severity of the wrong, and the nature and size of the collective. We should expect that *Sexism Survivors on Campus*'s forgiveness will look very different from whole nations' forgiveness for mass genocide. There will likely be procedural, emotional, ritualistic, behavioral, and relational dimensions of collective forgiveness that will vary depending on the context. But we can still observe at least three features of collective forgiveness that help us to distinguish collective forgiveness from individual and group-based forgiveness. First, the forgiveness offered is a result of a collective's established decision-making process. Second, the collective forgiveness involves a joint commitment to change the group's attitudes and behavior toward the wrongdoer(s), or to affirm the group's commitment to the more positive, already emerging relationship built on mutual

understanding and trust. Third, practices of forgiveness are at least fostered amongst group members through policies, shared norms and values, and the everyday actions of individuals.

There is a further question of when, if ever, collective forgiveness is appropriate. Even if we agree that *Sexism Survivors on Campus* has forgiven Iota Alpha, that the Amish community forgave for the killing of schoolchildren, or that a collective of Indigenous people in Canada forgave the government for the Indian Residential School System, we might wonder whether collective forgiveness in these cases was the right thing for the collectives to do. In some cases, such as the National Forgiven Summit, collective forgiveness might seem clearly out of place. I close by reflecting on some moral questions and concerns about practices of collective forgiveness.

5. The Ethics of Collective Forgiveness

So far, I have considered some potential models of collective forgiveness that begin to make sense of what it might look like for a collective to forgive. And I have given some reasons for thinking that performative and social practice models of collective forgiveness are more promising than emotional models. One reason I have been working with an imagined case is that it is much less controversial than real ones, with made up agents who mostly agree – as members of a collective – that it is time for the group to forgive. But of course, very few cases of collective forgiveness will look like this. And as collectives become even larger (e.g., whole nations), with multiple and overlapping wrongs and injustices done to individuals and smaller groups within the broader group harmed (e.g., harms done to women in particular), and when some victims of injustice are dead, matters become far more complex. There is a real question of whether collective forgiveness for severe, wide-reaching, and decades-long injustices should ever be offered.

Recall the forgiveness offered to the Canadian government at the National Forgiven Summit for the Indian Residential School System. It is possible that the forgiveness was or could have been collective, with Chief Kenny Blacksmith acting as a representative and performing an act of forgiveness on behalf of a collective of Indigenous people. He was not acting as a representative for all Indigenous people in Canada, but rather, attendees of the National Forgiven Summit who all decided to sign on to the Charter of Forgiveness. But criticisms of forgiveness articulated by Indigenous people in this context reveals a serious objection to practices of collective forgiveness. Windspeaker News, an Indigenous communications organization in Alberta, called the National Forgiven Summit "insensitive, insulting, and, in some ways,

intimidating" (Windspeaker 2010). When members of a social group harmed by injustice strongly disagree with a collective's decision to forgive, the collective forgiveness offered might seriously harm victims even further. For example, practices of fostering or promoting forgiveness amongst the collective may reach non-members of the collective who are not prepared to forgive. Non-Indigenous Canadians might also take the collective's forgiveness as evidence that colonial violence is in the past and that Indigenous people who fail to forgive are unreasonable. Collective forgiveness might thus contribute to the dismissal of victims' ongoing anger and their very reasonable refusal to forgive (Campbell 1994; Flowers 2015; Stockdale 2017). As Nadine Changfoot (2020) cautions, "forgiveness risks being linked to a line in the sand over which one steps not to look back and allows to be swept away into oblivion" (Changfoot 2020: 9).

There are also moral concerns about offering collective forgiveness within the collective itself. If collective forgiveness generates obligations on the part of individual members within a collective to forgive, then these obligations threaten the common thought that forgiveness is always elective (e.g., Card 2002; Moody-Adams 2015; Minow 2015). Even if collective forgiveness does not generate obligations amongst individual members but instead consists in fostering and promoting forgiveness across the group, individuals might still feel obligated and pressured to forgive in harmful ways. Thomas Brudholm and Aarne Gron (2011) raise concerns about the practice of promoting forgiveness in response to political mass violence. They point out that victims are often pressured to forgive through truth and reconciliation commissions, church sermons, presidential addresses to the nation, group therapy, and other policies and practices. The authors discuss the case of Rwililiza, whose wife and son were murdered in the Nyamata church massacre during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Rwililiza testifies that humanitarian organizations' practices of promoting forgiveness through posters, public awareness meetings, and other strategies is itself oppressive (Brudholm and Gron 2011: 160). Calls for forgiveness "are rarely embraced among survivors" in these contexts (Brudholm and Rosoux 2009: 42). Brudholm and Gron thus worry that "the public promulgating of the ideal [of forgiveness] may further burden the victims and turn their personal attitudes into some kind of public property" (Brudholm and Gron 2011: 164). Perhaps forgiveness *ought* to be a personal, rather than collective, process.

Alice MacLachlan (2012) responds to a number of objections to political forgiveness (of which collective forgiveness is one form). She admits that political forgiveness is sometimes offered on behalf of a harmed social group before all group members are prepared to forgive, and

that there are potential harms and risks of these instances of political (collective) forgiveness in practice. But MacLachlan also points out that there are reasons to worry about the negative effects of ongoing cultures of resentment (see also Tutu 2000). Sometimes, a political decision to forgive can be valuable to ending hostile and resentful cultures between groups that define them, and for promoting improved relationships moving forward. Political collective forgiveness might thus be valuable even if it doesn't reflect the attitudes of all individuals, and it can even be combined with creating space for honoring victims' experiences and providing reparations to individual victims (MacLachlan 2012). As Martha Minnow (2015) argues, empirical research should also inform nations' approaches to forgiveness of past atrocities. For example, research on public attitudes toward past injustices (e.g., victims' attitudes about Apartheid in South Africa and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission) can reveal whether forgiveness is valuable or harmful, and how nations might best pursue truth commissions in the future (Minnow 2015: 1615).

But can collective political forgiveness, or any case of collective forgiveness, be *genuine* collective forgiveness if it doesn't reflect the attitudes of all or at least most group members? In extreme cases, a collective might formally recognize just one individual as having the authority to act on behalf of the collective. So it might be in theory possible for collective forgiveness to be offered when only one member of the collective has decided that the group should forgive. Some scholars might insist that at least many or most members ought to agree with a collective decision to forgive for the forgiveness to be genuinely collective (Pettigrove and Parsons 2010). So perhaps this concern is best addressed in discussion about the nature of collective forgiveness. Others might see this problem as a *moral* one, about whether a collective should offer forgiveness when some or even many group members disagree with the collective's decision to forgive. On this view, whether collective forgiveness is genuine depends upon whether collective forgiveness resulted from a correct application of the collective's formal structures for decision-making and action (whether or not those formal structures for decision-making and actions are *just*). But if a collective's formal structures for decision-making and action are themselves unjust, then perhaps the collective forgiveness resulting from that process cannot be morally appropriate.

I take it to be an open question how these issues should be addressed, and there are many remaining questions about the nature and ethics of collective forgiveness. This chapter has considered how emotional, performative, and social practice models of forgiveness might extend to collective forgiveness. But there are further theories to consider. For example, Leo Zaibert

(2009) argues that forgiveness consists in a deliberate refusal to punish. It is thus possible that collective forgiveness consists in a group's decision to refuse to punish regardless of whether the group or its members have made an emotional transition away from hostile feelings (Zaibert 2009, 386-388). In political contexts, *amnesty* might also be a collective act of forgiveness through the waiving or cancelling of punishment (Bennett 2003). Luke Russell (2016) defends a similar view to Zaibert's according to which forgiveness is incompatible with continuing to punish in cases where wrongdoers do not accept their punishment. These are plausible alternatives to the theories considered in this chapter. It is thus not yet clear what, exactly, collective forgiveness *is*, and whether or when we should value collective forgiveness in the wide range of social and political contexts in which the question of forgiveness arises. But any plausible theory of forgiveness must be able to account for how the forgiveness is of a *collective*, distinct from the individual and group-based forgiveness of its members. There is much room to explore potential theories for how this might work.

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