NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Impossible Forgiveness: Levinas and Rwanda in Dialogue

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Field of Religious Studies

By

Joseph D. Moser Jr.

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

August 2015
ABSTRACT

Impossible Forgiveness: Levinas and Rwanda in Dialogue

Joseph D. Moser Jr.

This work focuses on conflict and recovery, using the forgiveness projects following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide as a case study and the philosophy of Levinas as a discussion partner in learning how we can and should respond to such violence constructively. I seek to construct a phenomenological theory of forgiveness attentive to the lived experience of embodied individuals who survived the genocide. In researching reconciliation and forgiveness as these phenomena emerge from, define, and are defined by human experience, I make use of data from a wide variety of sources, including commission reports, archival video footage, student theses and public memorial records, as well as substantial material in the arts including sermons, songs, poetry, painting, and sculpture.

In the tradition of philosophical phenomenology, this work is deeply influenced by the Levinasian argument that face-to-face direct contact between self and the Other (the person to whom one bears responsibility as a pure result of contact and the associated primordial request for respect) is a critical moment both in forgiveness and in reestablishing ethical responsibility. Such encounters – facilitated in varied settings across Rwanda – reestablish ethical recognition at the same moment that they cling fiercely to memory and memorialization. Notably, this strategy of forgiveness contradicts the dominant Christian popular rhetoric of forgetting and simultaneously bears markers of a distinctively Jewish insistence on memory. In Rwanda, and at large, no new vision of the future can exist without the past; forgiveness only becomes possible through heightened memory.
REMERCIEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the constant and enduring support of Laurie Zoloth (Northwestern University), Cristina Traina (Northwestern University), Hille Haker (Loyola University of Chicago), and J. Michelle Molina (Northwestern University), each of whom have in different but critical ways and times guided the imagination, construction, writing and editing of this volume. A special thank you as well goes to those professors who have been instrumental in my development as a scholar and who have guided this work at various times, including Adriaan Peperzak (Loyola University of Chicago), José Kagabo (École des hautes études en sciences sociales), Jean-Luc Marion (The University of Chicago), Dermot Moran (University College Dublin), Penelope Deutscher (Northwestern University), Samuel Fleischaker (University of Illinois at Chicago), Michael Morgan (Indiana University), Thomas McCarthy (Northwestern University), Dominique Karekezi (Kibungo University of Agriculture and Technology) and Paul Rutayisire (National University of Rwanda) who graciously oversaw my work while I was in Rwanda.

I owe a special debt of gratitude for all of those persons who were instrumental to the success of my research while in Rwanda on two separate trips, including Jean de Dieu Mucyo at the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide, the employees of the National Commission on Unity and Reconciliation, and all those tour guides, archivists, and curators at the memorials of Gisozi, Ntarama, Nyamata, Bisesero, Nyarubuye, and at the National Museum of Rwanda in Nyanza. For connecting me with several artists in Rwanda, a special thank you goes to Cyizanye Tony, Elizabeth Spackman, and Rebecca Niyonsaba.
This project has been made possible by generous support from a US Fulbright IIE grant in 2010-2011, a Graduate Research Grant from Northwestern University, and a generous dissertation year fellowship from the Panel on Theological Education of the Unitarian Universalist Association. My thanks are extended as well to all of those in Northwestern University’s Research Administrative Offices and who served as a part of Northwestern University’s Institutional Review Board who oversaw and approved the research with human subjects undertaken while I was in Rwanda.

On a more personal note, I lack the words to express the true depth of my gratitude to Marc Palmeri, who has taught me the true meaning of friendship, and to whom I will be always grateful for his constant care and support. My dearest friend and brother, Marc has always been by my side as I have struggled with material that has at times been exciting, at times emotionally difficult, and which, at times (as perhaps it ought) has broken me. For always being there to help me “put myself together again,” he commands my utmost respect, admiration, and love. To my mother, Peg, my father, Joe, my brother Joel, and my sister-in-law Katie, I extend my deepest appreciation for the unswerving faith they have displayed in me and my work, and for the unending caring love and encouragement they have graciously extended to me at every turn.

I have been deeply blessed as well to have a network of supportive friends, each of whom are among the most kind, genuine, and caring persons I have ever met, including Justin, Albert, Michael, Rob, Haley, Helen, Michelle, Erik, Jon, Mike, John, and Bree. A special thanks goes as well to those friends who encouraged and supported me while I was learning to live and conduct research in Rwanda, including Elizabeth, Kiran, Hyppolite, Nadia, Aleena, and Tejas.

I wish to express my deepest thanks to all of my students who have been willing to think and struggle with me on matters that were both intellectually and personally difficult. Finally, I
wish to thank the entire Medolark Camp community and in particular the Junior Counselors at Medolark who over the past decade have continued to think about Rwanda in the context of the ethics courses we have shared. My life has been consistently enriched by the members of this utopian community, one which radically and annually restores my faith in the beautiful possibilities that may yet be achieved when persons create and sustain a place where recognition of and responsibility for the Other are not mere dreams toward which to strive, but realities in which to live.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS FOR LEVINASIAN WORKS

As much as possible, the abbreviations in this work follow the conventional abbreviations for Levinas’s works outlined in the Levinas Concordance of Christian Ciocan and Georges Hansel (2005). Occasional modifications to this system are only made in instances where the French and English versions of the title are such that a standard abbreviation would result in non-differentiation between the two. In keeping with the standardized format of references used by the Concordance, all references to Levinasian texts in this work reference title, page number and line number in both French and in the English translation (where available). I.e., the reference QLT 58.14 / 9TR 26.29 is a reference to Quatre Lectures Talmudiques page 58, line 14 and to Nine Talmudic Readings page 29, line 29.

9TR Nine Talmudic Readings
AaT Alterity and Transcendence
ADV L’au delà du verset
AE Autrement qu’être ou au delà de l’essence
AeT Alterité et transcendance
AS Autrement que savoir
BV Beyond the Verse
DE De l’évasion
DF Difficult Freedom
DL Difficile liberté
DMT Dieu, la mort et le temps
DQVI De Dieu qui vient à l’idée
DSAS Du sacré au saint
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<td>ENf</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCM</td>
<td>Of God who Comes to Mind</td>
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<td>GDT</td>
<td>God, Death and Time</td>
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<td>HAH</td>
<td>Humanisme de l’autre home</td>
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<td>HN</td>
<td>À l’heure des nations</td>
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<td>HO</td>
<td>Humanism of the Other</td>
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<td>HS</td>
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<td>Otherwise than Being</td>
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<td>Time and the Other</td>
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<td>UH</td>
<td>Unforseen History</td>
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To all those who still hope for peace...

“There will be no humanity without forgiveness. There will be no forgiveness without justice. But justice will be impossible without humanity.”

“Il n’y aura pas d’humanité sans pardon. Il n’y aura pas de pardon sans justice. Mais la justice sera impossible sans humanité.”

“Ntabumuntu buzabaho budatanga imbabazi nta mbabazi zizatangwa hatabaye ho ubutabera ariko na none ubutabera Ntibuzashoboka ubumunto butariho”

-Mukagasana Yolande
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INTRODUCTION

An Experiment in Dialogical Phenomenology

“When they said ‘never again’ after the Holocaust was it meant for some people and not for others?”

– Appolon Kabahizi

“The face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death.”

- Emmanuel Levinas

The smell of Murambi sticks to you. Chemically treated bodies, preserved as a reminder of the horror. 45,000 killed. 60 rooms. Twisted decaying remains of bodies, bits of hair, machete-broken bones, a severed head. Upon my first visit to the site, I made it through twelve rooms before, choking down vomit, I had to stop and sit down. My guide, who had lost her mother, children, sisters, and her sisters’ children, sat to talk with me. I asked her at one point how it was possible to live in the same communities with the people who had done this. She gave a half laugh and looked off toward the surrounding hills. She chose not to answer. And there were 48 rooms left, locked, unseen – rooms which even on subsequent visits to the site, I have not yet been able to enter. I may never be so able.

1 Inscribed in the Kigali Memorial Centre at Gisozi.
The killing started in Murambi on April 16\textsuperscript{th} 1994, and by April 21\textsuperscript{st} had transformed this Technical School into the site of one of the most gruesome massacres during the Rwandan Genocide. It is now the site of one of Rwanda’s starkest memorials, preserving the remains of the victims, preserving the clothing left behind, preserving the site where French soldiers from \textit{Operation Turquoise} – the supposed rescue operation – built a volleyball field over the mass graves. As a memorial it is a testimony to atrocity and horror on many levels, an unabashed demand for memory.

By the time I was ready to leave, I had forgotten about the kids who had walked me there. Waiting for me again by the gates to Murambi were the village children, some seeking money, but most just looking to walk with me, to say hello, to play a little soccer, to hold my hand. A four-year old in particular who had to reach his arm high into the air just to hold my hand, instantly reminding me of the small girl on the way to the memorial who approached with open arms for a hug as I was walking down the road. I have encountered few affirmations of life, or moments of recognition, greater than that smile, or that embrace. As Susan Brison writes, “Life profligate, irrepressible, flaunts itself everywhere.”\textsuperscript{3} For the entire duration of the long walk back to Gikongoro, one person after another spoke with me, walked with me, laughed with me. All the while, I could still smell the death behind me; after three days I finally could get the taste out of my mouth. But the smell sticks with you.

Rwanda is a nation marked today by exactly these contrasts; an abundance of life teeming upon the same ground that holds nearly a million lives. Within the course of a mere fifteen years, Rwanda has seen transformations on a tremendous scale – direct-action democracy, some of the highest representation rates for women in government in the world, massive efforts at public

sanitation, and great strides forward in the alleviation of poverty. And at the center of the jumble of changes that have contributed to this new Rwanda lies the process of pardon, of forgiveness. Requiring face-to-face direct contact between what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas will term the self and the Other, pardon is not merely a process of reconciliation, or of erasing the past for a new future. In Rwanda, pardon is impossible without memory, without a preservation of the horrors of the past in the midst of a re-envisioned future. Forgiveness requires bearing the past into the future.

Jacques Derrida has written that the only thing worthy of forgiveness is that which cannot be forgiven. The condition of possibility for forgiveness is precisely its unforgivability, its philosophical impossibility. What it means to realize impossibility is the question that is at the center of my research in philosophy and in Rwanda. In Levinasian ethics, and in Rwanda, it means that in the very interpersonal contact between agents that occurs in pardon – in the wake of an unforgivable crime – lies the possibility of reestablishing ethical responsibility anew. And it means that the thought experiments of philosophy are never separable from the on-the-ground realities of interpersonal interaction in their most beautiful, and most horrifying permutations.

It is a central claim of this work that philosophical and religious ethical inquiry – indeed any good academic inquiry – begins not with the abstractions of thought, but with the real embodied experiences of actual persons. It is upon their bodies that ethical decisions are enacted, and it is with those persons and their experiences that ethics therefore ought to begin. As a phenomenologist, I am convinced that the best way to understand a phenomenon is not to begin with the abstractions of disembodied reason, but to begin with real manifestations of that phenomenon within the actual experiences of real human beings. To begin to grapple with the phenomenon of forgiveness, therefore, requires close attention to the ways in which it appears
within the world, in all of its problematic and difficult intricacies. It is a process that begins, therefore, with description, and then proceeds to analysis in an effort to understand the phenomenon as it functions in human consciousness.

In an effort to explore the remarkable phenomena of forgiveness and reconciliation in Rwanda we will therefore approach the subject through a number of different angles. In a manner reminiscent of many religious practices, we will circumambulate this remarkable phenomenon, seeking it out in a number of different manifestations. Drawing upon a wide array of sources, this works seeks to investigate forgiveness as it appears in two different post-genocidal contexts, one European and one African. And as we shall see, in both instances – within Levinasian philosophy in the wake of the Shoah, and within Rwandan thought and practice in the wake of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi of 1994 – remarkably similar ideas emerge.

A Work in Ethics

It is important to be clear from the beginning what this work is, and what it is not. This work is a phenomenological investigation of a human phenomenon – termed alternately pardon or forgiveness⁴ – within human consciousness. It is an effort to understand not *if* persons forgive others for acts of monstrous evil, but, rather, to understand *what* persons mean when they claim to have forgiven another. In the process, this work will become a discussion of the importance of memory and memorialization, the effects of trauma and restoration upon time, the necessity of

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⁴ Following with Levinas’s use of the term, and the dominance of the French language in Rwanda’s colonial history, this work is large part is an examination of the French term *pardon*. In the French, this is a term that holds together juridical, religious, and interpersonal meanings. As such, I do not differentiate in this work between the two English translation options of pardon (usually conveying a juridical or religious sense of the idea) and forgiveness (usually conveying a religious or interpersonal sense of the idea).
contrition and punishment, and the centrality of justice within the remarkable phenomenon of human forgiveness.

At the same time, I must be clear that it is not an attempt to provide a history of either the events leading up to, or directly following from, the Rwandan genocide. While like any scholar I make use of the resources of historical inquiry when relevant, I am an ethicist, not a historian. Several excellent histories of Rwanda, both of the history leading up to the genocide, and of the events which followed, are available. The first substantive history of the Rwandan genocide is *The Rwandan Crisis* of Gérard Prunier, published in 1995, though it is a narrative that is not without substantive problems. Linda Melvern’s *A People Betrayed* (2000) and *Conspiracy to Murder* (2004), both benefit greatly from the space of time and perspective, but the best history currently available of the genocide is, by at least an order of magnitude, Mahmood Mamdani’s

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6 Prunier presents the entire history of modern Rwanda as one within which external factors served to incite and deepen ethnic ‘hatred’ and opposition which were solidified under Belgian rule (though he unfortunately implies that these actions were based on quasi-reasonable assumptions). For Prunier, the political events serve only to radicalize and divide pre-existing ethnic divisions, divisions which while problematic he nonetheless presents as ‘natural.’ There is so very much wrong with this. To state but a few: precolonial history is entirely absent; the process of racializing Tutsi/Hutu/Twa differences is left nearly untouched and at times is even justified; all agency in the process is placed upon the Europeans who are presented, if anything, as having ‘taught’ the Rwandan population its true nature; not to mention the consistent problem that the simplistic ‘divisions’ upon which Prunier focuses almost completely eclipse both clan and élite status divisions essentially until Prunier turns to 1990. Finally, the overall tone of the work must be noted. Not only are there moments of deep sarcasm, but Prunier is flippant to a fault. Nearly everyone in this work is described as being one of the ‘boys.’ Whether the RPF ‘boys’ or the MRND ‘boys,’ this term serves only to conjure images of a club without providing an adequate explanatory basis in historical events. The choice leaves one wondering to which club of ‘boys’ Prunier himself belongs. This is made rather clear in Prunier’s discussion of the rationale for French involvement in the Hutu republic and the support France offered for countering the RPF. Therein, Prunier pontificates at length about the wondrous glory of France and the horrors of the Anglo-Saxons, complete with his off-the-cuff comment that ‘the Quebec question’ will soon be resolved once and for all through a triumphalist secession. There is a lot of wine and cheese in this passage, and – a consistent problem throughout the work – very little support, documentation, or facts. We are simply to accept that Francophone filiality is enough, and we are to take Prunier’s personal opinions as sufficient proof. This does not, of course, imply that Prunier is necessarily wrong. It is simply that his own sense of Francophone filiality, while clearly strong, is insufficient. And while actual historical details are not altogether missing, the crux of the argument should lie on *those events*, and not on Prunier’s own sense of nostalgia.

When Victims Become Killers (2001). Placing Rwandan history within the larger East African context, Mamdani is incredibly astute at showing the ways in which events in Rwanda were effected profoundly by the political realities present in The Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire) and Uganda in the second half of the twentieth century. Jan Vansina’s effort to reconstruct early Rwandan history through linguistic etymologies is likewise a monumental addition to our understandings of Rwandan history. Additionally, the modern understanding of Rwandan history has likewise benefited from Michael Barnett’s *Eyewitness to a Genocide* (2002), Roméo Dallaire’s *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003), Scott Straus’s *The Order of Genocide* (2006), and Andrew Wallace’s *Silent Accomplice* (2006). On the journalistic front, Jean Hatzfeld has provided important contributions to the histories both leading up to and following the genocide in *Into the Quick of Life* (2000), *Life Laid Bare* (2000), *Machete Season* (2003), and *The Antelope’s Strategy* (2007). Journalist Phillip Gourevitch likewise provides an excellent introduction to the realities both of Rwanda’s history and life following the genocide in the nation in *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*.

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Finally, the edited volume *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches* (2004), makes important contributions to our understanding of the role of the Roman Catholic church in the events leading up to the genocide as well as during the genocide itself.

This work is likewise not an attempt to provide the intellectual history of the notion of pardon. This has been well-presented in several recent works including both Charles Griswold’s *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (2007) and Margaret Holmgren’s *Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing* (2012). Griswold, in particular, provides a helpful historical overview of the development of the term forgiveness, from its earliest appearances in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Epicurus’s *Letter to Herodotus*, to the discussions in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* and *Twilight of the Idols*, to the Christian analysis provided in the work of Bishop Joseph Butler of both resentment and forgiveness. As an intellectual history of the idea of pardon, Griswold’s narrative is impressive.

This work is, then, a phenomenological examination of two post-genocide contexts in an effort to determine phenomenologically what is meant precisely by the term pardon, and how the phenomenon functions within human consciousness as demonstrated through thought, speech, language, action, and creative acts. In so doing, it draws upon the resources of religious studies, theology, history, philosophy, anthropology, and art history, based in the claim that the most profitable and richest academic discussions emerge not through the rigorous attachment to

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19 Phillip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).
23 See in particular Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 1-37.
disciplinary lines but rather from the points of contact and resonance across discipline`ines. This work is, therefore, deeply interdisciplinary by design, not merely by consequence.

The current reality is that there has been virtually no attempt to understand what, precisely, is meant in the Rwandan context by the term forgiveness. That individuals forgive has been well established.24 Yet, what it means to an individual to forgive another, often one who has committed an act (or many acts) or profound horror to that individual or her family, is poorly understood. Further, in what does exist, there is little consensus. Government reports dictate one vision while religious organizations profess another. Non-governmental organizations in Rwanda, including Prison Fellowship International and Avocats Sans Frontiers among many others, likewise maintain their own investments and vision. And all of these visions often differ profoundly from the understanding of the phenomenon displayed and enacted by living embodied persons.

As a phenomenologist attentive to lived experience, I will turn in this work to the experiences and thoughts of concrete persons, experiences which push the limits of possibility in their very nature. I argue that such ‘limit cases’ in philosophy – cases wherein the investigation of the experience of a phenomenon would appear to be impossible (such as with death) or wherein an event which by all rights appears impossible and yet occurs (as in forgiving the unforgivable) represent not an aberrant or special class of a phenomenon, but rather a distillation of the crucial elements of that phenomenon. As we thus proceed, we will attempt to push phenomenology away from a purely first-person perspective, and toward a broader context wherein a wide range of data points may contribute to the richness of the description and analysis

24 See, among others, Catherine Claire Lawson, As We Forgive: Stories of Reconciliation from Rwanda (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
of forgiveness that *does occur*, even in a place where both practically and philosophically its manifestation would appear to be impossible.

In light of this goal, the work intentionally draws material from two rather different contexts. It makes use of the impressive phenomenological-philosophical achievements of Emmanuel Levinas in the wake of the Second World War and the Shoah, turning to a theory of pardon developed in Levinas’s works that holds great potential to illuminate our description of pardon after acts of extreme violence. It likewise investigates the ways in which pardon is manifested in post-genocide Rwanda, asking how ordinary Rwandans make sense of the extreme difficulty – even improbability – represented in the act of forgiving another, and how communities are woven back together in the wake of genocide through radical acts of recognition. It does so in an effort to inquire after the ways in which the manifestation of pardon in each context – manifestations which though arising from radically different historical and cultural contexts nonetheless bear incredible similarities – may further inform and clarify our understanding of pardon as a phenomenon within human consciousness. This work, then, is a dual parallel phenomenological inquiry into the idea of pardon.

**An Experiment in Dialogical Phenomenology**

This work is therefore likewise an experiment in methodology, inquiring after the limits of phenomenology, and specifically after how to prevent phenomenology from being reduced to a purely first-person set of armchair European musings then applied to diverse contexts. The question is therefore one of how European theory might be brought into dialogue with non-European contexts without simply creating a new form of imperialism in thought. In this work I will therefore both propose a different methodological approach in principle – one I will term a
dialogical phenomenology – while simultaneously seeking to apply this approach to one moment of intercontinental contact, that of post-genocide French thought and post-genocide Rwandan thought and practice. So to do, however, requires proceeding with intention and caution.

It is certainly true that any effort to return European, or specifically French theory, to the Rwandan context may rightfully be met with suspicion. Indeed, even though in recent years relations between the two nations have softened slightly, relations between France and Rwanda both historically and currently are monstrously problematic. In 2006, a French judge accused current Rwandan president Paul Kagame of involvement in the shooting down the plane of Juvénal Habyarimana in 1994, the event which many claim sparked the start of the genocide. This was a poorly veiled attempt to delegitimize the leadership of Kagame, by claiming he was thus partially responsible for the genocide against his own people. In 2008 the Rwandan government accused 33 senior French military and political officials, including former French president François Mitterrand, of direct involvement in the genocide and crimes against humanity.25 And in October of 2008, Rwanda decided to abandon its use of the French language. The language of business, government, and education in Rwanda is now transitioning to English. Ostensibly, this move is an economic one. As Aloisea Inyumba, a senator and member of Kagame's ruling party, claims, “This is not about France, this is about us. Introducing English is just being realistic. English is the language of business.”26 Jessica Karera, a civil engineering student at Kigali Institute of Science and Technology, states a more complicated picture at play even before the official decision was made. "Mostly, it's for economic reasons. After 1994, Rwandans could see that the countries colonized by England had achieved much, much more."

She hope[s] that Rwanda will restore relations with France, now that France has Sarkozy at the helm. But that new relationship will only be meaningful if France "accepts what they did in the genocide. They can give $10 billion in aid, but that isn't going to replace all the people who died."27

France is currently as unwelcome as it is ubiquitous in Rwanda. The French ambassador has been expelled on several occasions,28 the embassy alternately closed reopened and closed,29 and the language has been and is being removed from education, government, and business. Then, in late April of 2014, the Rwandan government forcibly closed and confiscated the French cultural centre in central Kigali.30 As the 20th commemoration of the genocide approached in 2014, the countries once again found themselves embattled in a major diplomatic dispute. France decided not to send a high-level delegation to the 20th Commemoration ceremonies in response to a Rwandan accusation that the French government aided the genocidal regime in 1994 (a widely documented reality), resulting in Rwanda then revoking the accreditation of the French ambassador for the memorial ceremonies.31 Rwanda has likewise in response restated its repeated demands that France cease providing shelter to accused genocidal criminals.32 The question at hand, then, is the relevance of such political relations to the potential use of French theory in Rwanda, which given the current realities of the education of Rwanda’s civil and academic leadership is solidly present across the country. In at least one instance, the possibilities which emerge from bringing French theory into dialogue with Rwandan practices are immense. As I will argue, it is my conviction that the Levinasian conception of ethical encounter and his

28 McGreal, “Rwanda to Switch.”
31 Mike Pflanz, “Rwanda bans French envoy from genocide memorial,” The Telegraph, April 7, 2014.
profound vision of forgiveness – *one that preserves the dignity of persons lost while reweaving the bonds that make society and ethics itself possible* – have an extraordinary amount to offer to, and in common with, the contemporary discussions of forgiveness and reconciliation processes in Rwanda. And yet, this movement in thought raises a dilemma. Is the use of Levinas, a 20th Century French Jewish intellectual figure, to understand what is transpiring in a sub-Saharan east-African context merely another form of the same colonial importations which have already caused disaster in Rwanda? In other words, is this use a form of intellectual colonialism? Particularly when Rwanda has made its opinion of France quite publicly known?

The question is thus whether the use of French theory in the Rwandan postcolonial context is justifiable. I will argue that Levinasian philosophy offers one model for encounter that resists the dangers inherent in colonial domination and provides a methodology of great value when considering cross-cultural encounters of theory and ideas, precisely because these encounters are always also simultaneously encounters between persons. In so doing, Levinas offers an iteration of the subject as always-responsible in a place where its own marginality might become, as bell hooks notes, a site of resistance to the dominant patterns of hegemonic colonial power.33

Emanuel Levinas’s work centers upon a close and careful examination of the nature of human interaction. Levinasian ethics begins not with normative assumptions of goodness or evil, nor with attempts to craft regulative ethical principles from reason.34 The central argument lies in the notion that the individual is pulled from the trappings of its singular totalizing interiority at

the very moment of encounter with that which resists actively all efforts at totalization. This encounter – in the most radical sense – is with the Other, the not-me, the one who both resists my gaze and places a command upon me that is at once inescapable and infinite. The Other for Levinas, is the one who speaks the *hineni*, the *me voici*, the ‘here I am’ as a command written upon her face. Always echoing Abraham standing before God, the Other speaks from the heights with a command that can be rejected, but not escaped. In this face-to-face moment of full nudity, barren openness, this state of being held hostage to the Other, one first discovers one’s being, and one first discovers one’s existence as always-already responsible. In this system, beginning prior to ontology, ethics is “first philosophy.”

Pardon, though not a central concern of Levinas, enters the discussion at the point where responsibility is not upheld. As we will see in Part I of this work, a remarkable theory of pardon emerges from across Levinas’s twenty-eight major published works. For Levinas, pardon does not merely act upon the depths of the past, but maintains the possibility of creating a future weaving together the fractured strands of time which linger in the wake of violence. In this weaving, a number of attributes emerge from Levinas’s theory of pardon. First, pardon is immediately connected with moral fault, a moral failure which Levinas ties to the very nature of a totalizing being itself. Second, pardon acts uniquely in time, in order to rewrite history, to unsettle the totality of a history of forward-marching-being which seeks to encompass all within its purview. Third, pardon is intimately tied to memory, representing the purification of the past event. Fourth, pardon reorders time such that history is both loosened and tied back together; the fabric is unwoven and rewoven, out of the same strands but in a new fashion that

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36 See also: *Tel* 207.33-208.11/*Tal* 231.23-38.
unites past, present and future. And fifth, in line with Derrida’s analysis of the concept, pardon is aneconomic, arriving by gift beyond all transaction, and central to Levinas’s methodology, face-to-face.

This aneconomic face-to-face aspect of pardon bears striking resemblance to Rwandan reconciliation projects. Yet, in Rwanda it is paradoxically in the context of economic rebuilding that reconciliation projects often emerge, examples of which include housing construction or crop processing. In either case, often the victim and criminal are brought together to work side by side, face-to-face laying bricks, or processing sorghum. While highly controversial, these projects facilitate direct interaction between precisely those agents between whom the bonds of responsibility have been shorn. From a Derridean perspective, there is no escaping the fact that this interaction is economic. Indeed, the project itself is *purely* economic; it is generally understood and made quite clear that the reconciliation efforts seek to restore material losses, not to return the murdered to an impossible presence. And yet, this is precisely what often happens. In the process of building or crop processing, conversation that begins with the mundane inevitably turns to the subject of those events shared by the participants in the project. As their impossible presence is in a sense restored, it allows the beginning of the creation of a shared past, the construction of a history created in dialogue face-to-face, where responsibility between the victim and criminal, between the criminal and the victim, and between the living and the dead is reestablished. Thus in economic exchange a vehicle for aneconomic gift emerges *because* the face-to-face interaction is fundamentally an act of recognition that includes both the

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construction of a shared past, and the commitment to live in the wake of this history while envisioning a new future.

Emerging from the proposed encounter between Levinasian theory and Rwandan practice lie a number of parallel notions: acceptance of moral fault, aneconomic gift, face-to-face interaction, the reconstruction of a shared past, the reordering of time in a commitment to a new future. Yet a question remains given the historical context concerning the appropriateness of bringing Levinasian theory – French theory – into dialogue again with Rwanda. Previous French influences in Rwanda – to be extremely generous – have not exactly proved productive. From Franco-Belgian colonization, to the importation of the racist “Hamitic Hypothesis,” to François Mitterrand’s support of Hutu extremist movements, to the delivery of machetes to Rwanda during the genocide by France, to French volleyball courts built over fresh mass graves, to the disastrous Operation Turquoise which only intervened to preserve the genocidal power structure, there is good reason in Rwanda to be wary of European – and especially French – importations.

Is it legitimate in this context to discuss Rwandan practices in dialogue with the contemporary French theory represented by Levinas? Or does this merely compound a long history of domination? bell hooks notes the clear dangers in a famous passage when she writes:

no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own.38

It is certainly true that description of Rwandan practices in European terms, or worse, attempts to conform those practices to French theory would indeed amount to a new form of intellectual imperialism. Any description or analysis wherein the French party retains sole mastery over the terms of discourse can be nothing more than intellectual colonialism. And yet

38 hooks, “Marginality,” 343.
the challenge lies in how to preserve dialogue in a specific situation wherein real affinities persist, and the larger challenge of how to retain the possibility of real dialogue between opposing members that both have been damaged by oppressive colonial systems. I want to propose two possibilities of how this might transpire. First, the use of Levinas may amount to a form of transcontinental solidarity. And second, the nature of Levinas’s own theory serves to invert the traditional hegemonic colonial structure in such a way that the encounter itself might become a mode of resistance in an act of recognition.

First, I argue that engagement between Levinas and Rwanda may legitimately represent a form of transcontinental solidarity. Levinas himself is a marginal character even within the Continent. Twice an outsider as a Lithuanian Jew in Paris, even Levinas’s Jewish Orthodoxy is outside of traditional expressions. Levinas survives the Holocaust in a work camp, having lost his entire extended family to the monstrosities of the Third Reich; he is well-acquainted with horror and violence on a personal level. In many real ways, in his early career, Levinas is the outsider in France par excellence. We must never forget that his first book was written while in a work camp, and that Totalité et Infini was written while Levinas worked as a high school teacher in a Jewish private school. From this position, it may be that Levinas occupies a place to speak as the subaltern to the subaltern – making the question of the use of his philosophy for understanding forgiveness in Rwanda one of solidarity, not importation. The issue would then transmigrate to one of the oppressed speaking to the oppressed, in a comparative effort to overcome imposed genocidal domination. There is a certain truth to this approach. And yet, this is perhaps an oversimplification that also merely begs the question. Were we to justify use of Levinas on such grounds, what might be said of the use of Derrida, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, or even, to cross more important borders, Heidegger?
The practical difficulty with a solidarity thesis resides in the fact that, at least by 1973, Levinas is himself *eminently* French. By 1973 when Levinas began teaching at the Sorbonne, Levinas had been a naturalized citizen for more than 40 years, served in the French army, and had migrated to the very center of French intellectual life. It was merely a year later that Levinas would publish *Autrement Qu’être ou au del de l’essence* as a direct response to Derrida’s critiques in “Violence et Métaphysique,” entrenching him for the rest of his life in the center of ongoing debates in the French academy. Even given his history, by 1973 Levinas is also himself fully a member of the privileged, powered, cultural élite.

Thus our second option emerges not from personal histories or identities, but from the inversion in powered roles which lies at the center of Levinasian ethics. For Levinas, the Other designates something rather different from the way the term is often used in postcolonial discourse. To construct the “Other” as subordinate or as a shadowed version of the self, as Spivak and others rightfully note to be the case in colonial constructions of “otherness,” misses the true depths of Levinas’s term. For Levinas, no other is truly Other who can be defined by hegemonic discourse – this is totalization, control, colonialism – not encounter. The true Other, the *Autrui* in Levinas’s terms, is the one who is encountered in responsibility, the one who cannot be defined, who resists all efforts at domination precisely in the weakness, the vulnerability, of her face.

This is explained through the remarkable metaphor of height. The Other is encountered upon the heights, issuing a command to be respected and protected upon the subject who approaches. Like the biblical command issued from God to Abraham, or warmth descending

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40 *Tel* 273:16 / *Tal* 297.3, among others.
from sunlight, the command from the face of the Other descends upon the self in the very act of encounter, a command which can be disregarded, but cannot be ignored. At once the powered relations are reversed. The one who approaches is responsible, the Other empowered. The true import from Levinas to the Rwandan context rests in a methodology of encounter that converts the Other through genuine ethical meeting into a status no longer as subaltern, but as what we might term “superaltern,” as occupying the privileged self-asserted position of height upheld by ethical command.

This encounter then represents a meeting of worlds in dialogue that enacts responsibilities in multiple directions, and as an epistemic transontological encounter that prohibits unilaterality itself. Rather than representing importation or intellectual colonialism, to read Levinas with Rwanda on forgiveness is then to realize that all inquiry, all approach, all encounter begins with acts of recognition. It is to commit to seek pedagogies and epistemologies that emerge from Rwanda itself such that the meeting of worlds is accomplished in the establishment of a set of parallel investigations that serve to cross-fertilize and inform each other. And it is exactly this Levinasian method that has import to the encounter of ideas involving other “first-world” thinkers in other superaltern locations.

In the wake of a colonial legacy of extreme violence, I argue and attempt to demonstrate that modern academic work in the western academy concerning the Global South can only legitimately emerge from dialogue, in an experiment in parallel dialogical phenomenologies that can create new knowledge in a third hybrid space of encounter.41 The aim cannot be to import Levinas to Rwanda any more than to export Rwanda to Europe, but rather to imagine the contours of a cross-fertilizing dialogical phenomenology, one in which philosophical and

41 Among others, see Emilie Townes, Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).
religious theory attended to embodied experiences as real manifestations of phenomena, not as partial reflections of a purported ideal. It is to imagine, as Homi Bhabha notes, that “Third Space”\(^{42}\) where meaning, symbol and truth are created discursively anew, in a *shared* discourse.

In so doing it will be necessary to push traditional phenomenology beyond the first-person approach which has long dominated the field. In line with the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer\(^{43}\) or François Lyotard,\(^{44}\) I am convinced that the descriptive task within phenomenology can benefit greatly from the use and inclusion of actual data. In this work, this will be demonstrated through the use of multiple sources of data in an effort to more closely understand what is meant, precisely, by forgiveness in post-genocide contexts. It is for this reason that this work makes use of government reports, Christian sermons, artwork in a variety of media, architecture, history, and individual testimony. Put quite simply, the richer the description, the richer the theory that then emerges from the phenomenological reduction in the effort to understand how the phenomenon functions in human consciousness.

The great benefit which Levinas brings to ethics as a phenomenologist is the omnipresence of the face of the Other, direct and immediate, demanding recognition and protection. Levinas writes that “the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death.”\(^{45}\) For Levinas, the encounter with the Other is not one wherein there *should* be a transfer of ethical responsibility, but, rather, one wherein there *is* a transfer of responsibility. As a phenomenologist of human encounter, responsibility emerges

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\(^{42}\) Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.


\(^{45}\) Cohen, *Face to Face with Levinas*. 
from Levinasian thought as an accurate description, not an ethical ideal. It is perhaps for this reason that for so much of his life Levinas resisted being described as an ethicist.

The Levinasian phenomenological method affords to cross-cultural intellectual and practical contact an ability to uncover the fundamental dignity of human beings met not in theoretical abstractions, but in practical moments of encounter which themselves enact webs of responsibilities that cannot but persist. Ethical responsibility, therefore, is – and must be – the beginning, center, and end not merely of academic postcolonial inquiry, but of all honest human interaction. In such a context, then, dialogical phenomenology provides great potential for real, genuine, intimate, ethical interaction between agents and worlds. This is, then, the final aim of reading Levinas with Rwanda, to enact a series of ethical responsibilities in which both parties – European and African – manifest their core ideologies, practices, and beliefs with a critical openness even to the most profound of transformations. And through that encounter we might be able to move, as bell hooks notes, into “that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer.”

Were the discourse able to move into such a space, it might also open new possibilities. Such new possibilities in thought are what we currently seek in this experiment in dialogical phenomenology.

**A Work in Two Parts**

In an effort to imagine and enact such a dialogical phenomenology, this work is therefore divided into two sections. In Part I, we will begin with the writings of a holocaust survivor and French philosopher who in his own right has redefined the face of modern ethics, Emmanuel

46 hooks, “Marginality as a Site of Resistance,” 343.
Levinas. We will then bring this philosophical system into discussion with certain Rwandan practices. In Part II, we will do the reverse, beginning with Rwandan thought and practice and then bringing such notions into conversation with the work of Levinas as well as of certain other contemporary continental philosophers. In each instance the aim is, as discussed above, to imagine the ways in which these two remarkably similar parallel systems of thought might inform one another, deepening the human understanding of pardon as we so do.

Part I is divided into three sections. It begins with a discussion of pardon in the Levinasian corpus (1). A close textual study tracing Levinas’s use of the term "pardon" across his twenty-eight major published works, we will endeavor to follow the development of his thought on what is, admittedly a largely peripheral topic of concern. As one who is intentional and deliberate about precise word choices, we will tease out of these works a coherent and powerful theory of pardon, one that was itself written under the horizon of the Shoah. This first section divides Levinas’s works into three broad periods. The early period is herein defined as spanning from Levinas’s famous *Esprit* article of 1934 entitled “Several Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism until his final published works prior to *Totalité et Infini*. In this period references to pardon are scattered and rarely well-developed, though they reveal an understanding of pardon as an apparatus releasing one from the existential fault derived from one’s status as a “being,” as well as gesturing at times toward a more interpersonal sense of the term. Marking the beginning of his middle period, *Totalité et Infini* provides one of the first extended discussions of pardon. The middle period includes as well the remarkable Talmudic Lecture published in *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* as “Toward the Other,” which is in itself the only close and extended discussion of pardon in the Levinasian corpus. I mark the middle period as ending with Levinas’s *Autrement qu’être ou au delà de l’essence*, itself a revision of *Totalité et Infini* prompted by the
famous critique of Jacques Derrida in 1967. The middle period is dominated by discussions of pardon as an interpersonal phenomenon, in concert both with Levinas’s own philosophy and with Jewish theology and tradition. The later period includes all that follows after Autrement qu’être ou au delà de l’essence until Levinas’s death in 1995, a period marked by a turn in Levinasian thought toward more political or worldly concerns. In the latter period we find both the presence of the existential sense from the early works and the interpersonal one that dominates the middle period.

After a detailed journey through sixty years of Levinasian thought, we will turn to the Rwandan practice of Gacaca (2). A reimagined monarchial practice, Gacaca was instituted in Rwanda following the genocide as a means of expediting the judicial system’s processing of persons accused of crimes of genocide. Marked by a decidedly restorative justice approach, one that sought to provide a balance between punishment and leniency, the practices of forgiveness that emerged from Gacaca bear striking resemblance to the work of Levinas in post-genocide Europe half a century earlier. In the final section (3), “Crossings,” we will turn our attention directly to these moments of contact, particularly looking at the need that justice be tempered in dealing with such crimes, as well as at the effect of pardon upon human experiences of time.

Part II is likewise divided into three sections, though in Part II we will begin with Rwandan thought and practice and then proceed to bring the conclusions arising therefrom into discussion with Levinas and certain other continental philosophers. Chapter 4, “Twese Hamwe: The Art of Forgiveness,” begins with the work of several Rwandan artists. We will explore the concept of pardon as it manifests through the exhibits housed in the Rwandan National Museum of Art, largely through three ongoing exhibits: first, the acquisitions from the School of Art of Nyundo in the 1990s; second, a collection from April of 2006 entitled “Tolerance;” and third, a
collection from October of 2006 entitled “Art for Peace.” As we see a remarkable sense of interdependent fractured identity, memorialization, and an unswerving responsibility emerge from these works, we will also bring these conclusions into dialogue with the philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jacques Derrida.

Chapter 5, “Bathed in Blood and Light: Memory and Memorialization,” begins with an examination of three memorial churches within Rwanda, one where the genocidal history has largely been elided, another where the church was turned into a formal memorial and tomb, and a third which has developed a remarkable hybrid identity as memorial and active congregation. This chapter focuses upon the centrality of memory as an inescapable component of forgiveness. It inquires after what it might mean to forgive and remember. In the process the discussion partner will be Emmanuel Levinas, additionally engaging with R. Clifton Spargo’s astute notion of “vigilant memory.”

Chapter 6, “Compelled to Forgive: Competing Discourses Among Rwandan Christians,” examines the question of whether forgiveness can ever be compelled, or whether it must be given as gift. The chapter examines discrepancies between governmental and religious authoritative statements which border on attempting to compel persons to forgive, and individual testimonies which repeatedly portray forgiveness as a gift which may be given only by the victim. In discussion with Emmanuel Levinas, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jacques Derrida, we will suggest that Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of givenness provides a helpful means of understanding the radicality of the gift represented in the phenomenon of forgiveness.

The final conclusion chapter which follows Part I and Part II is an attempt to restate the phenomenological theory of pardon based upon the ideas which have emerged from this

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extended experiment in dialogical phenomenology. It argues that pardon is ultimately a human phenomenon marked by an insistence upon memory with an unusual ability to reorder time. As a gift given by the victim after justice has been achieved, I ultimately argue that pardon is, at its very center, an act of recognition in the most profound sense. It is for this final reason that pardon has the power – when engaged appropriately – for incredible transformation in societies that have been fractured and broken by actions of extreme violence. It is only when one again becomes willing to encounter another as an Other, in the Levinasian sense of the term, that true restoration of community becomes possible. The success behind such an approach is seen clearly in modern Rwanda today, a nation that in just over twenty years has been transformed from a genocidal nightmare to a model of peace and prosperity for sub-Saharan Africa. I argue that much of the transformation which Rwanda has seen in the last two decades stems from consistent attention to the powerful notion of pardon which has emerged in parallel in both post-Shoah Europe and post-genocide Rwanda.

**Peace and Transformation as Purpose of Inquiry**

This is a work conducted with purpose. As a scholar of Levinas, I remain ever aware that the omnipresence of Others to which we are responsible is inescapable. What is too often overlooked in modern scholarship is the reality that all academic inquiry transpires in a situation where one is always-already, to use Levinas’s term, responsible, where the Other always awaits a response to the fundamental request for respect written upon her face. It is for this reason that I remain convinced that scholarship – particularly in ethics – must be conducted always with respect to the actual experiences, beliefs, thoughts, convictions and needs of a visceral other who awaits a response. To remain justifiable, ethical inquiry must never be reduced to a set of mere
thought experiences. As phenomena that find their genesis and persistence in the lives and bodies of Others, the force and drive of contemporary ethical inquiry must therefore remain engaged with the realities currently facing the world.

And the world in which we currently live is one that tragically faces no lack of violence. From economically depressed urban violence, to callous disregard for persons not privileged enough to be born in the so-called first world, to the mass-violence which still continues in Syria and Burma, to the mass-executions carried out repeatedly by terrorist organizations sweeping the Middle East, post-violence and post-genocide contexts are unfortunately neither currently rare, nor does it appear that they will become a rarity in the near future. In our current world, the sheer numbers of Others awaiting ethical response and recognition are staggering. While the current inquiry may not provide the tools to stop such violence, it is nonetheless my hope that this work will provide guidance as communities continue the profoundly difficult processes of reconstruction after decimation. Ultimately, then, this is a work undertaken with the hope that the understanding of forgiveness herein revealed may help in the processes of peace and justice that are central to rebuilding societies and communities that have been shattered by acts of unfathomable evil. With such an audacious hope in mind, let us begin.
Part I
Is forgiveness possible after genocide? Having lived in and traveled to Rwanda on multiple occasions, having smelled the stench of decomposing bodies and seen firsthand the true aftermath of genocidal violence, I am eternally and consistently surprised that the answer to this question, at least in Rwanda, is a resounding yes. Rwandans do indeed forgive, in what amounts to one of the most impossible situations imaginable, and yet they do so in practices and processes that bear striking resemblance to the theory of forgiveness developed by Emmanuel Levinas, the French Jewish philosopher and Holocaust survivor, in the wake of the Second World War. Part I of this work, then, is an effort to clarify, as we examine together this truly remarkable phenomena, what precisely this “forgiveness” signifies and in which ways it is indeed “possible.”

Part I of this work is therefore an overview of Levinas’s writings on pardon in an effort to bring this work into discussion with remarkably similar processes that have emerged in Rwanda in the years following the 1994 Rwanda Genocide Against the Tutsis. I will begin with a close textual examination of Levinas’s writings on pardon, detailing all references to the term across Levinas’s twenty-eight major published works. Though not a central thematic concern to Levinas, I will establish that a coherent, cogent, and powerful theorization of forgiveness permeates his major published works. We will proceed through the works largely chronologically in an effort to show the development in Levinasian thought. I will then turn to the Rwandan context to explore how the controversial practice of Gacaca justice – local tribunals tasked with prosecuting crimes of genocide – has itself given birth to a remarkably similar conception of forgiveness and reconciliation. I argue that the Gacaca courts, and the systems of justice and punishment they set in place, help to allow forgiveness and reconciliation to emerge as possibilities. Finally, I will note several crucial points of contact between these two systems,
one developed by a Holocaust survivor in postwar France, and one developed in practice in post-genocide Rwanda. In the process it will become clear that both Levinasian theory and Rwandan practice have rich potential to illuminate each other, as well as important insight to offer into community rebuilding efforts in other post-violence situations.

To begin, then, let us turn to Levinas writings on forgiveness.
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Levinasian Pardon

“Pardon – the return to the human – is only possible after sanction.” – E. Levinas

We begin from the outset with the assumption that Levinas – as one fascinated by and obsessed with language – chooses his words very carefully. Assuming word choice to be intentional, then, we can infer a great deal from his language. Indeed, in many ways, we will be treating his language much as we would read carefully crafted oral testimony or artwork as testimony (both of which we will engage in Part II of this book), reading for the precise content expressed by his word choices, not merely for overall generalized ideas.

Even with such a close reading technique, however, there remain a number of places where little or no content can be derived from appearances of the term pardon and its cognates. And thus there are a number of uses of the term that are of little interest to our current study. First, it appears in several texts as a consequence of the French translation of Yom Kippur.

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48 NLT 20.17 / NTR 58.10
49 See, among others: DSAS 14.03, 51.25. There are periodic references as well to the Hebrew term Teshuvah, often translated as repentance, though occasionally as pardon. On references to the latter, see, for example: QLT 153.10 / 9TR 71.28 and its reappearance at QLT 183.20 / 9TR 86.2, QLT 153.6 / 9TR 71.32 and its reappearance at QLT 183.4 T / 9TR 86.15.
Second, in a number of places Levinas uses the term purely rhetorically (i.e. forgive my attempt to explain…, etc.).

Third, in a few instances there are passing references without any real details indicating what is meant by the term.

For the purposes of this chapter, we will divide Levinas’s works into three broad periods. First, the early period (pre-1961) comprises those texts published before the first great systemic work detailing his own philosophical system, Totalité et Infini. Second, a middle period spans from the publication of Totalité et Infini (1961) up to and including its revised presentation as Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence (1974), a period which also sees the beginning of Levinas’s Talmudic Lectures (which will continue nearly annually throughout the rest of his career). Third, the later period includes those texts published after Autrement qu’être, post-1974 until Levinas’s final articles in the late 1980s, a period in which we see the mature exposition of his thought, increasing attention to more direct tangible questions of interpersonal ethics and world politics, and a persistent concern with questions of Jewish philosophy, theology, and history. In the process, what will emerge is a powerful vision of forgiveness – one which emerged from Levinas’s own post-genocide reality – that presents forgiveness as a possible interpersonal event precisely because of its simultaneous ability to function as an apparatus releasing one from the guilt derived from one’s own ontological status.

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50 See, among others: DSAS 59.28, 94.03; QLT 126.4 and “Beyond Messianism,” from the set of commentaries from 1960-1961 and published in Difficile Liberté, which contains a reference to pardon cited from the Talmudic text Tractate Sanhedrin wherein Rabbi Hillel (the elder) claims that Israel will not receive a messiah. In reference to this, R. Joseph responds “May God forgive him” (DL 111.38 / DF 82.16). This same story is reproduced in the 1971 article “L’Etat de Caesar et l’etat de David” (ADV 218.26) and in Emmanuel Levinas (Qui êtes vous?) (1987), “Le Mauvaise conscience et l’inexorable” (EL 159.22).

51 See, among others: DSAS 50.26, QLT 175.20 / 9TR 82.20.

52 Following “Violence and Metaphysics” (Jacques Derrida’s famous critique of Totalité et Infiniti), Levinas redevelops his system attentive to a number of issues in postmodern linguistic theory. The revised presentation of the system is published as Autrement qu’être in 1974, built around the newly-developed conception of substitution.
A. Early Period (1934-1960): Fragments

The early period of Levinas’s thought spans from the famous *Esprit* article of 1934 up to the publication of his first great work (*Totalité et Infini*) in 1961. It would be difficult to deny that expositions of pardon in this period are scattered and incomplete, as in this period pardon does not represent a primary topic of concern for Levinas. In general, the concern in this early period rests with pardon as a kind of existential apparatus that releases the individual from a fundamental state of guilt incurred as a result of one’s status within the totalization of being. To this end, pardon is discussed often in deeply philosophical terms, rather than in the more interpersonal manner in which it later appears. As we will soon see, in this period we find discussions of the effect of pardon upon time; its relationship to the connected ideas of remorse, repentance and repair; its relationship to peace; and its fundamental connection to ethical responsibility. Even though the focus is more upon the existential sense of the term, a number of crucial ideas concerning interpersonal pardon are present as well, even in this early period. Even in these early texts, Levinas is clear that pardon must remain a freely-chosen interpersonal event that represents a dialogical interaction between individuals; forgiveness by a third party is expressly prohibited. Pardon herein is likewise fundamentally impossible without contrition, restitution, justice and punishment. It remains, however, the conception of forgiveness as an existential apparatus that dominates this period. It is to this concept of forgiveness as an existential apparatus present in the earliest works that we will first turn.

Levinas’s famous *Esprit* article of 193453 “Several Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism”54 contains one of the earliest references to pardon in the entire Levinasian corpus.

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This first reference appears as Levinas is discussing the development of freedom and liberation in relation to time and history in Western society. Establishing the perception of history as “the most profound limitation” to liberty, Levinas describes time itself as the very condition of the irreparable. It is time, as history, which – in a move characteristic of Levinas’s other writings – totalizes the past such that the present can only be a continuation of a pre-established trajectory, herein a kind of Husserelian protention. Thus time as history, for Levinas, is the irreparable itself, as it precludes the possibility of true freedom, of the new, even of encounter when all are understood as occurring within the purview of its horizon. In this context, Levinas writes of pardon:

Le judaïsme apporte ce message magnifique. Le remords – expression douloureuse de l’impuissance radicale de réparer l’irréparable – annonce le repentir générateur du pardon qui repare. L’homme trouve dans le présent de quoi modifier, de quoi effacer le passé. Le temps perd son irréversibilité même. Il s’efface énervé aux pieds de l’homme comme une bête blessée. Et il le libère. IH (30.1-7)

Judaism bears the magnificent message that remorse – the painful expression of a radical impotence to repair the irreparable – announces the repentance that generates the pardon that repairs. Man finds in the present the wherewithal to modify the past, to erase it. Time loses its

the final years of Levinas’s life as he was struggling with Alzheimer’s disease. Though Hayat compiled the work, Levinas himself provided the title.

54 UH, xii.
55 IH. 29.9.
56 IH. 29.11.
57 Rather than a grand unifying concept, as it functions in Hegel or Heidegger, for Levinas history represents the cataloguing and systemization of all difference within a narrative that by definition seeks to remove true difference in favor of a history of ‘the same.’ As such, ‘history’ is totalizing and oppressing for Levinas. Such an approach to history ends, inevitably, for Levinas with the suppression of all real differentiation, a moment powerfully realized for Levinas in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. As Jean-François Lyotard writes, “we have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one.” Lyotard, Postmodern Condition, 81.

58 In Husserl, protention is the future-oriented act that correlates to retention. Retention signifies the return to mind or presence of past events, always re-interpreted and framed by present ideas, concepts, and concerns. Like retention, protention is likewise an intentional act for Husserl, wherein even the future is only understood and thus only ever ‘arrives’ – as a result of forward-looking intentional mental acts. The future, for Husserl, is thus as much framed by intentional content as the past. Future imagining and memory are thus two sides of the same intentional framing.

59 True freedom in Levinas is not the freedom to act as an unrestrained autonomous being within the world. So to do, for Levinas is to overlook the profound realities of responsibility that result from interpersonal face-to-face contact, and therefore to become bound by the totalizing and limiting forces of being (represented in history) itself. True freedom for Levinas, therefore, is the freedom from being that simultaneously frees the individual to responsibility flowing from the experience of human encounter.
irreversibility. Time, exasperated, collapses at man’s feet like a wounded animal. And liberates him. (UH 14.19)

Pardon, therefore, is the process that reverses the irreversibility of time, a doubled impossibility that unseats the totalizing forces of history, by reenacting and recreating a true present in which encounter is again possible. This occurs by a fourfold process involving remorse, repentance, pardon, and repair. Several points are herein of note. First, this act occurs in speech. Remorse announces repentance because remorse actualizes repentance through its own speech act. And it is the very weakness of remorse – its inability to repair the irreparable – that allows it to overcome precisely this perceived limit. 60 Second both remorse and repentance are preconditions for forgiveness. This then is effectively a requirement for private and public transformation. There must be change in the individual both within the heart (remorse), and then with practical action (repentance), prior to pardon. As Levinas notes, it is exactly in the transformation that pardon’s possibility is generated. And it is only then that repair – the repair precisely of the irreparable – becomes possible. The practical aspect of this is critical, for it establishes that repair flows from forgiveness, which itself flows from repentance and remorse.

The next two occurrences of the use of the term pardon and its cognates in Levinas’s published works occurs in De l’existence à l’existant published in 1947. One of Levinas’s earliest works, wherein he is still working through the development of his ethical philosophy of alterity, in De l’existence à l’existant, Levinas attends to the notion of pardon only in passing. Therein he writes:

Atteindre autrui ne se justifie pas par soi-même. Ce n’est pas secouer mon ennui. C’est ontologiquement l’événement de la rupture la plus radicale des catégories mêmes du moi, car c’est pour moi être ailleurs qu’en soi, c’est être pardonné, c’est ne pas être une existence définitive. La relation avec autrui ne saurait être pensée comme un enchaînement à un autre moi…. il n’est possible de saisir l’autérité d’autrui…” (EEf 144.24-145.02)

60 This focus on weakness as a form of strength continues throughout Levinas’s works, including the famous passage in Ethics and Infinity that ethics is not stronger, but better than all the powers in the world. See, among others, “Philosophie et l’idée de l’Infini,” Section IV.
Reaching the other is not something justified of itself; it is not a matter of shaking me out of my boredom. It is, on the ontological level, the event of the most radical breakup of the very categories of the ego, for it is for me to be somewhere else than my self, it is to be pardoned, to not be a definite existence. The relationship with the other is not to be conceived as a bond with another ego…. It is not possible to grasp the alterity of the other.” (EEe 85.29-86.6)

This passage is particularly intriguing, coming in the first of Levinas’s works published after the end of the war. It speaks to a fundamental state of guilt which appears to affect all persons in their solitude. There is a certain inward selfishness accompanying the fullness of individual solitude which Levinas suggests here causes the individual to incur a degree of guilt, one which places the individual in need of forgiveness. This also suggests that the moment of forgiveness is copresent with the moment of the establishment of responsibility, as it is responsibility that free one from this individual solitude. While this is an example of one of Levinas’s own beautiful turns of phrase, it is likewise deeply revelatory of an early vision of the fundamental guilt that is incurred with the encounter of the Other, wherein responsibility is established, and where thereby the individual is broken out of its solitary existence, is forgiven.

This passage is noteworthy in that forgiveness occurs precisely at the same moment as the establishment of responsibility.

In a further passage within the same work, Levinas laments that this connection is precisely what has been lost in the history of classical philosophy. He writes:

La philosophie classique passait à côté de sa liberté qui ne consiste pas à se nier, mais à se faire pardonner son être, par l’altérité même d’autrui. Elle sous-estimait dans le dialogue par lequel autrui nous délivre, l’altérité d’autrui, puisqu’elle pensait qu’il existe un dialogue silencieux de l’âme avec elle-même. (EeE 161.03-161.09)

Classical philosophy left aside the freedom which consists not in negating oneself, but in having one’s being pardoned by the very alterity of the other. It underestimated the alterity of the other in dialogue where the other frees us, because it believed there existed a silent dialogue of the soul with itself.” (EaE 97.05-97.11)

In this passage, Levinas compares the problems with what he alternately at times in the work terms “la philosophie traditionelle” or “la philosophie classique” (used herein as a term to denote the history of philosophy which rests upon a foundational concern with ontology, up to and
including Bergson and Heidegger) to the philosophy of the Other which he is proposing. The reference here to “se nier” (self-negation) is likely a reference to the Heideggerian view of death as the final possibility of impossibility, a point which Levinas will elsewhere attack with vigor. Here again, however, we see the same echoes of the previous passage from EE, as this early text thereby establishes pardon as arising from the face-to-face encounter with the Other as an existential apparatus that is copresent with that of responsibility. Pardon herein again arises as a possibility because of the encounter with the alterity of the Other, an encounter which frees the self from being to the true freedom of responsibility.

And yet, in its interpersonal sense, this sense of forgiveness is itself always limited. In the 1952 text “Simone Weil Contra La Bible,” published in Difficile Liberté, Levinas makes the point in a discussion of biblical genocides that

la possibilité du pardon Infini invite au mal infini (DL 185.36) 
the possibility of infinite pardon tempts us to infinite evil (DF 139.12)

To suggest or support a pardon without consequences, without the need for punishment, would be to suggest to humans that all actions might be allowable, even the most horrific. For if pardon is available without need for recompense – without cost – acts of evil could be unwritten too easily. In the same text, Levinas continues to note that punishment is itself a form of respect for the guilty person. He writes,

Admettre le châtiment, c’est admettre le respect de la personne même du coupable…. Aimer son prochain, cela peut vouloir dire entrevoir déjà sa misère et sa pourriture, mais cela peut aussi vouloir dire voir son visage, sa maîtrise par rapport à nous. (DL 186.6)

To acknowledge punishment is to acknowledge respect even for the guilty person’s person…. To love one’s neighbor can mean already to glimpse his misery and rottenness, but it can also mean to see his face, his mastery over us, and the dignity he has. (DF 139.20)

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61 First published in Evidences, No. 24 (1952).
62 DL 184.38 / DF 138.21
63 This same claim reappears in Levinas’s 1971 “Désacralisation et Désensorcellement” published in Du Sacré au saint wherein Levinas likewise expresses a concern with a forgiveness that knows no limits as a grave injustice (DSAS 94.25 / 9TR 144.15).
This tie between punishment and respect implies the necessity of memory as well, as punishment can only be issued accordingly and appropriately when there is clarity concerning the events which have transpired. It is not to provide blanket amnesty, but rather, to solidify respect for the individual as a result of the acknowledgment that comes in the issuing of judicial or moral punishment.

Moving toward the middle of the decade, in a discussion of revealed religion in his 1954 article “Le Moi et le totalité” published in Entre Nous (1991), Levinas addresses pardon in three separate senses: first, the existential understanding; second, the relationship of pardon to an intimate society; and third, the interrelation of pardon and Levinas’s problem of the third party.⁶⁴

The first sense of pardon addressed in “Le Moi et le totalité” is the existential meaning we have already seen, wherein pardon releases one from a sense of primordial guilt resulting from one’s culpability as a totalizing “being.” Levinas writes:

le pardon divin rend son intégrité initiale au moi en faute (ENf 30.26)
divine pardon restores to the I at fault its initial integrity (ENe 18.36)

The implication in the text is that through forgiveness by the infinite – the divine – the morally questionable person is returned to a kind of wholeness worthy of respect. The fault expressed at this point is an existential fault deriving from the nature of one’s existence within being, a state (as expressed in earlier texts above from this same period) in need of rectification by the infinite/divine. Thus the self is said to be “freed” from its autonomous freedom through the responsibility of ethics inaugurated in the encounter with the infinite, herein the divine (though expressed in other places equally as the Other) (ENf 32.04, 32.07 / ENe 19.30, 19.32). And yet, in his own world, Levinas sees this more as a historical relic than a present condition. Levinas

⁶⁴ In Levinasian texts, the problem of “the third” represents the advent of justice, wherein the presence of a third party forces one to make decisions adjudicating one’s competing responsibilities between an Other and every third.
proceeds to lament the fact that modern humanity in large part is no longer interested in the spiritual life, the life in contact with the infinite, and thus a sense of guilt remains (this seems to be a reference to a kind of existential dis-ease). Without revealed religion, a representation of life in the midst of the infinite, Levinas argues that this guilt therefore cannot be “forgiven by piety” (ENf 31.10 / ENe 18.36), for, as he argues:

le mal qui pèse sur elle n’appartient pas a l’ordre du pardon. (ENf 31.12)
the evil that weighs on them does not belong to the order of forgiveness. (ENe 19.1)

As he proceeds, Levinas notes in terms of the interpersonal sense of the term that the “forgivable transgression” (ENf 31.17 / ENe 19.6) is an intentional act, one committed by a person with purpose. It is for this reason that forgiveness has always entailed the “examination of conscience” (ENf 31.19 / ENe 19.7) in order to come to terms with that which the self has done. Further, Levinas argues that the intentional act (as opposed to mystical transgressions resulting from accidental violation of a taboo) represents a step forward in spirituality precisely because of intentionality (ENf 31.22 / ENe 19.11) represents the chosen intimate contact with the infinite, with the Other.

Following this closely, in his second point, Levinas argues that forgiveness is only possible in an “intimate society.” By this he intends the close – and always intimate – encounter between the self and the other, which is itself the encounter with the infinite. It is for this reason that Levinas is able to claim that:

les conditions d’un légitime pardon ne se réalisent que dans une société d’êtres totalement présents les uns aux autres, dans un société intime. (ENf 31.25)
the conditions of a legitimate forgiveness are realized only in a society of beings totally present to one another, in an intimate society (ENe 19.14)

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65 The Smith and Harsav translation renders the French “conscience” as “consciousness,” a misleading translation given the phrasing.
The aim herein seems to be that it is only within the intimate encounter of self and other that the fullness of the crime committed and the harm thereby done may be known. In such a setting, all external realities and concerns are secondary to the moment of radical encounter. It is for this reason that he writes:

La société intime qui rend possible le pardon libère la volonté du poids des actes qui lui échappent et qui l’engagent (ENf 32.20)

The intimate society that makes forgiveness possible frees the will from the weight of acts that both escape and commit it (ENe 20.5)

A somewhat strange paradox thus occurs whereby within intimate encounter the realities of external life and external commitments are made secondary to face-to-face interaction, and yet it is only within such face-to-face interaction that pardon (itself an exterior-focused act) may be granted. Intimate relation therefore enables the conditions of pardon while making the knowledge of the crime being addressed (knowledge of which is itself a condition of pardon), though not unimportant, of secondary importance to the encounter itself (ENf 32.4 / ENe 19.30 and Enf 32.7 / ENe 19.32).

Whether such intimate relation even ought to be the paradigm under which forgiveness is evaluated is, however, an open question at this juncture. For as the intimate dialogical relation is always an interaction between the self and the infinite (alternately termed Other, Infinite, or Divine), this presents a problem when framed exclusively between the I and God precisely because such an interaction never can occur within such a dualist locale. Levinas is careful to note that it does not suffice to present such an interaction as love. The problem, for Levinas, is therefore one which arises in any situation wherein there persist only the self and an Other, be it the divine or another human. When based upon love, responsible action for Levinas entails being limited by searing personal biases, which often ultimately become more about a desire for possession than for respect. This is perhaps the reason that in this early text Levinas relegates
forgiveness to the realm of God and saints (see ENf 32.20 / ENe 20.17 and ENf 32.34 / ENe 20.18), the perfectly infinite Others who have the capacity to act impartially toward all Others in acts of recognition not bound by the individual commitments displayed in the concept of love. He thus writes explicitly:

On ne pourrait accepter légitimement le pardon que si Autrui est Dieu ou saint. (ENf 33.2)
One could only accept forgiveness legitimately if the other is God or a saint. (ENe 20.25)

God and saints herein exist as representations of complete infinity encountered intimately, encountered in such a manner where recognition – not love – is the dominant experience of encounter. And yet, Levinas is clear to note that even as recognition, this dually intimate encounter is precisely this that creates the “crise de la religion” / “crisis of religion” (ENf 34.11 / ENe 21.29), for the arrival of the third party (the third human in this case) interrupts the dialogue between self and God, always forcing a dual responsible relationship to englobe its field of reference. With the third party, one is always faced with multiple responsibilities, and it is with this realization that Levinas argues that the advent of justice arrives. For in the midst of multiple infinitely alterior Others, one must decide which responsibilities one will be able to fulfill.

This then brings us to Levinas third point concerning forgiveness in the text, wherein Levinas notes that it is because of the presence of the third party that infinite forgiveness (ENf 34.23 / ENe 22.2) cannot be given by the divine, precisely because in acts worthy of forgiveness the need to address questions of justice between persons is paramount. The fault against another person cannot simply be transformed into a fault against God (even if a secondary fault also exists toward God for the violation of divine law). Levinas explicitly states this when he writes that no one is able “répondre et de pardonner pour un autre” / “answer and forgive in the place of
This is because forgiveness in such a case would rescind “la violation d’un être libre par un autre” / “the violation of one free being by another” (ENf 40.35 / ENe 27.35). Perhaps most clearly he writes:

Il n’y a d’injustice vraie – c’est-à-dire d’impardonnable – qu’à l’égard du tiers (ENf 40.39)
There is no real – that is unforgivable – injustice, except in relation to a third party. (ENe 28.1)

Again, the central concept herein is the idea that one may not forgive on behalf of another. This is both because sins against other humans are fundamentally rooted in human (not divine) interaction, and because so to do would represent the failure to acknowledge the full integrity and dignity of the person harmed.

The reality of the constant presence of the third party likewise, however, raises a question for Levinas concerning the nature of the crime committed as well. He argues that

le pardon suppose surtout que le lésé recueille tour le maléfice du tort et, par conséquent, dispose entièrement du droit de grâce. (ENf 31.20)

forgiveness assumes especially that he who is wronged has borne the whole evil of the wrong and, consequently, disposes entirely of the right [of grace]. (ENe 19.8)

While Levinas wants to ensure that forgiveness is indeed limited to the individuals directly involved, preventing forgiveness on behalf of another, this is only possible when the fullness of the wrong is known, and the full reach of its consequences understood. The possibility of such complete knowledge in the wake of monstrous evil, of course, is highly suspect. This reality itself, then, might serve as an important corrective. One can only forgive the harms done directly to oneself, even as one acknowledges that a single action may inflict harm that extends far

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66 This would seem to present an interesting addition to the latter notion found in Autrement qu’être of substitution (Section IV) wherein one takes upon one’s own body the needs of the Other. It would appear that while one can take the needs of another upon oneself, one cannot take the faults of another upon oneself, and neither can one act on behalf of those faults to a third party.

67 This is also the critique at the heart of Vladimir Jankélévitch’s condemnation of the crimes of the Holocaust as remaining “beyond any possibility of pardon,” a point which Levinas takes up in his 1987 article entitled “Vladimir Jankélévitch,” in the section entitled “L’Éthique” published in Hors Sujet (1987). The work was originally published in L’information juive, July 1987.

68 Lingis’s translation here reads “right of pardon” in place of the French “droit de grâce.”
beyond one individual. One would appear, therefore, in this early text to forgive the harm done, and not the action. This clarity is a point which we will see as well when we turn to Rwanda’s Gacaca trials, though it is not an idea to which Levinas returns in depth in the later works.

In many ways this is a transitional text in terms of Levinas’s understanding of pardon, “Le Moi et le totalité” shows concern both for the more existential meaning of forgiveness, and likewise for forgiveness as an act transpiring between individuals. Even at this early juncture, we should note that within these references, Levinas essentially argues that forgiveness involves an act of recognition, not an erasure of guilt. As a dialogical moment, it represents both freedom from an existential condition of fault (given the nature of one’s status as being) expressed through recognition of the Other, and an interpersonal act designed to restore intimate human community following wrongdoing. The latter only become possible at the moment when the person seeking forgiveness is able to address directly the precise person against whom morally suspect or reprehensible actions were committed. Even in this early text, therefore, Levinas expresses both the fundamental problem with what he will later call the totalization of being and the correlative need for an existential forgiveness granted in encounter, as well as the basis for the twin needs of contrition and restitution, which will eventually be expressed through the economy of exchange at the heart of his expression of justice. Forgiveness, as it were begins – and ends – with the encounter of the specific Other and her needs.

The concern with focus on specific Other(s) is likewise at the very foundation of Levinas’s concern with a conception of the divine that could theoretically forgive without limits. In his 1955 “Aimer la Thora plus que Dieu,” published in Difficile Liberte, Levinas inquires –

69 First broadcast on Ecoute Israël, 29 April, 1955.
as he does repeatedly throughout his career – after the meaning of suffering innocents by engaging in a discussion of a text concerning the Warsaw Ghetto. Rejecting outright the notion of redemptive suffering, Levinas likewise calls into question a vision of God who “distribuait des prix, infligeait des sanctions ou pardonait des fautes” / “dished out prizes, inflicted punishment, or pardoned sins” (DL 190.26 / DF 143.11). This would be a God, who, according to Levinas, would treat persons as eternal children. For our current purposes here, Levinas thus rejects the notion of a divine who passes out merit or punishment based purely on will without the fundamental interpersonal element present in both his earlier texts wherein forgiveness functions as an existential condition of encounter with the Other, and expressed in his later texts through the explicit need for contrition on behalf of the one who has committed the act in need of forgiveness.

This concern with the differentiation between human acts of pardon and divine acts of pardon continues in his 1957 “A Religion for Adults.” The second essay in the collection published as Difficile Liberté (1976), Levinas attempts to precisely delineate the difference between divine and human pardon, noting the limits in particular of divine pardon. In conversation with Talmudic readings of the story of Cain from Genesis, Levinas explains,

La sagesse juive enseigne que Celui qui a crée et qui supporte tout l’univers ne peut pas supporter, ne peut pas pardonner le crime que l’homme commet contre l’homme. (DL 37.18)

Jewish wisdom teaches that He Who has created and Who supports the whole universe cannot support or pardon the crime that man commits against man. (DF 20.23)

70 See in particular Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering” in ENe and ENf.
71 Another similar reference occurs in Levinas’s 1966 Article “Avez-Vous relu Baruch?” first published in Les Nouveaux Cahiers, No. 7, Autumn, 1966. Therein Levinas also makes reference to the notion of “la dogmatique simple des croyants” / “the simple dogmatic faith of believers” (DL 154.11 / DF 115.22), and suggests that such a God requires only “un culte spirituel, pardonant, et miséricordieux” / “a spiritual, pardoning and merciful worship” (DL 154.14 / DF 115.24). Levinas will later argue that Spinoza has misunderstood the importance of the Talmud, presenting it instead as folklore and thus a fully human invention (DL 155.7 / DF 116.10) .
The aim here is to establish the appropriate realm of both divine and human pardon, and to ensure the separation between both. Levinas continues by noting this explicitly,

la faute commise à l’égard de Dieu relève du pardon divin, la faute qui offense l’homme ne relève pas de Dieu. (DL 37.22)
the fault committed with regard to God falls within the province of divine pardon, whereas the fault that offend man does not concern God. (DF 20.26)

Human beings maintain, Levinas argues, in their dealings with other humans, a complete autonomy. Human evil, therefore, is something which by definition is beyond the rectifying power of any ritual, and the impetus for pardon for such action thereby rests fully upon human – not divine – action. No world exists in which the divine may stand in for the person injured, precisely because of the inexhaustible uniqueness of the individual:

Personne, et pas meme Dieu, ne peut se substituer à la victim. (DL 37.29)
No one, not even God, can substitute himself for the victim. (DF 20.33)

Radically unique, singular, alterior, the Other as victim occupies a privileged place which cannot be supplanted or replaced by any other, even a divine other.

Since Levinas has already established that the possibility of pardon is generated at precisely the same moment as the command which establishes ethical law, it should be no surprise that his discussion of pardon in Difficile Liberté locates pardon as an eminently human phenomenon based in human interaction. This does bear, however, several important consequences. First, any efforts at pardon must be directed only toward the one injured, and never toward a proxy. While it is the case that actions carried out against an individual may likewise cause harm toward a third party, this simply reveals a situation in which there are multiple crimes (or evils) which ensue from a singular action, and wherein each distinct crime requires its own resolution. Second, because the individual as victim is irreplaceable, this creates important limitations on the possibility of forgiveness in cases where the victim is no longer
living. In this passage Levinas notes – more directly than usual – that there is no forgiveness for one who has killed another. Were forgiveness to become possible in such situations, pardon itself would become, as Levinas writes, “all-powerful” (DL 37.30 / DF 20.34) and the result would be the creation of a world that is “inhumane” (DL 37.30 / DF 20.34). Forgiveness that could transpire without the involvement of the victim would therefore serve to reduce the Other to a mere object used in order to assuage the guilt of the perpetrator. This would itself be the ultimate inhumanity, creating of an agent an object under the guise of forgiveness. Thus forgiveness is only possible in situations wherein the Other, and its alterity, is preserved. And third, forgiveness is fundamentally dialogical. For even if it ultimately is transmitted as a gift, the conditions enabling the giving of such a gift require a dialogue between agents.

“L’Arche et la momie”72 of 1958, likewise a piece that centers upon understandings of Jewish identity as established through the enactment of the law, also makes this explicit claim of the differentiation (traditional to Jewish thought) between sins against human beings and sins against the divine. Therein, Levinas writes:

…Dieu est le maître de la justice; il juge au grand jour de la pensée et du discours. Ce Dieu ne peut pas se charger de tous les péchés des hommes; le péché commis contre l’homme ne peut être pardonné que par l’homme qui en a souffert; Dieu ne le peut pas. (DL 79.21)

…God is the master of justice; he judges in the open light of reason and discourse. This God cannot see to all man’s sins; the sin committed against man can be pardoned only by the man who has suffered by it; God cannot pardon it. (DF 54.14)

Again we see that for Levinas forgiveness is only possible between the agents involved. It may not occur on behalf of a third party, and it may not be given by the divine; it may only be given to the one who harmed by the one harmed.

Although a *deeply* flawed text on numerous fronts,\textsuperscript{73} Levinas in “Le Judaïsme et Le Féminin” returns again to this same fundamentally dialogical understanding of human ethics and pardon. In this 1960 text Levinas describes the bonds of marriage as simultaneously social and an opportunity for self-awareness. With a biblical reference to the figures of Adam and Eve, he notes that

\begin{quote}
 sans la femme, l’homme ne connaît ni bien, ni aide, ni joie, ni bénédiction, ni pardon. (\textit{DL} 54.38) \\
 without woman man knows neither good, nor succor, nor joy, nor blessing, nor pardon. (\textit{DF} 33.43)
\end{quote}

For our present purposes, what is instructive herein is again the fundamentally interpersonal nature of forgiveness which becomes possible because of interpersonal contact. This is in line with earlier texts wherein pardon becomes possible because of the existential conditions of interaction, as well as in later texts wherein pardon is explicitly an event between persons. At the completion of the text,\textsuperscript{74} Levinas, in his discussion of Elijah, objects to a vision of humanity that is “dans son essence virile, surhumain, solitaire” / “in its essence virile, superhuman, solitary” (\textit{DL} 60.7 / \textit{DF} 38.10). He continues to suggest that this self:

\begin{quote}
 se reconnaît en Elie, le prophète sans pardon, le prophète des colères et des châtiments, nourrisson des corbeaux, habitant des déserts, sans douceur, sans bonheur, sans paix. (\textit{DL} 60.7) \\
 recognizes itself in Elijah, the prophet without pardon, the prophet of anger and punishment, a suckling of crows, inhabiting deserts, without kindness, without happiness, without peace. (\textit{DF} 38.11)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} First published in \textit{Age Nouveau}, No. 107-108, 1960. This is, admittedly, a *deeply* problematic text. Perhaps an attempt to reflect his own experience as an Orthodox Jewish man in a rather traditional marriage, Levinas nonetheless repeatedly makes claims concerning the nature of “femininity” that are at best deeply misguided, and at worst, deeply oppressing. That conceded, it does not appear that Levinas’s critique of the “feminine” affects the core of his system of thought. Re-framed as a discussion on the importance of the “home,” if non-gendered, as a center for support, encouragement, and development that allows for the full development of the human being, much of the underlying point remains. His deeply-flawed gender essentialism, however, remains utterly unjustifiable.

\textsuperscript{74} It must be noted that in the final section of this text, Levinas describes the feminine, and explicitly “the woman,” as “the source of all decline.” In his discussion of “Rabbinc thought,” he notes that through “the creation of Eve,” male destiny was sealed. Levinas herein contrasts an image of masculinity which is solitary and rooted in being, against a feminine that before original sin possessed “true life, joy, pardon, and peace” (\textit{DL} 59.37 / \textit{DF} 38.5). The weight of a century of feminist though more than suffices as an \textit{absolute} objection to these unfortunate claims. It is, however, of note herein that again the implication concerning pardon is that it is fundamentally non-solitary, non-ontological.
Perhaps most interesting for our present purposes is what might be gleaned from a negative reading of this text. Given the attributes that are herein listed as following in the wake of a person who allegedly does not demonstrate pardon, we might therefore infer that following pardon one might expect to see kindness, happiness and peace, as well as a reduction in anger and punishment. Such a reading is consistent as well with Levinas’s later texts wherein pardon does involve a restoration of community through acts of contrition and recognition.

The final text of this early period to address pardon is found in the transcriptions of Levinas’s 1960-1961 commentaries from the World Jewish Congress conferences. Therein Levinas explains the process of addressing offenses committed against human beings. He writes, in “Is the Coming of the Messianic Era Conditional or Unconditional?” of such an offense,

Elle ne s’efface que par le pardon de l’offensé et exige une reparation qui doit partir de celui qui a offensé. 

It can be effaced only when the offended party offers pardon and demands reparation from the offender.

Herein we see again the centrality again of the fact that the right to pardon remains firmly rooted with the individual harmed. It is, as will continue throughout Levinas’s texts, her right to grant or not to grant, never something that can be compelled. To an important degree forgiveness remains a right ensconced within the very person, the very body, of the individual harmed.

In another commentary from the same series, entitled “The Contradictions of Messianism,” Levinas addresses this notion again as he discusses fear over the possible failings of moral and divine justice. In a passage concerning a discussion of the “earthly family” (the world of humanity as opposed to the “divine family” which represents the notion of angels), Levinas notes that “the victims of evil” feel in their flesh

75 The texts included on Messianism in Difficile Liberté are transcriptions of papers Levinas delivered at the third (1960) and fourth (1961) conferences of Jewish intellectuals. These conferences were planned by the French Section of the World Jewish Congress (DL 84.5/ DF 59.20).
le prix redoutable de l’injustice pardonnée, le danger de la remise gracieuse du crime (DL 108.39)

the formidable price of injustice that has been pardoned, the danger of the gracious remission of crime (DF 80.4)

First, the importance of the body as a medium of encounter for forgiveness and the remission of crime provides an important focus on embodiment in this early text. Second, however, Levinas herein points to a warning, one rooted deep within the body itself, concerning the dangers that injustice be pardoned too easily. And yet, at the same time, in the broader passage Levinas engages the Talmudic discussion of God as hesitating before issuing punishment upon evil persons, implying that even when justified the use of violence gives pause. This could perhaps be interpreted as an early move again toward the need to temper punishment, and the extreme care with which all persons should regard any and all expressions of violence, for – as he claims – if such acts elicit hesitation by even the divine, so much more should they elicit hesitation on the part of human beings.

This same theme continues in “Messianism and Universality,” the final Talmudic commentary from the 1960-1961 set of six reproduced in Difficile Liberté, where Levinas writes:

Le texte biblique se révolte contre le messianism idyllique du pardon universel et rappelait toute la sévérité que comportent justice et judgment. (DL 122.34)

The biblical text rebels against the idyllic messianism of universal pardon and reminds us of the stark severity entailed in justice and judgment. (DF 91.40)

As we have seen before, universal pardon results in the complete abdication of justice, itself a crucial component of forgiveness for Levinas. And while justice does itself demand punishment, as we will see in Quatre Lectures Talmudiques in 1963, and as Levinas noted in “The Conditions of Messianism” already discussed, violence in any form always merits very careful consideration and hesitation before use. As we will see developed more completely in Levinas’s middle period,

76 The work references Tractate Sanhedrin (88b) in a discussion of why at the end of time God “porte les mains sur ses flancs” / “holds his hands on his loins” (DL 108.21 / DF 79.27) prior to the sacrifice of the wicked for the preservation of the good.
Levinas notes, even in these early texts, the need for tempered punishment, even when more severe forms may be warranted.

**B. Middle Period (1961 up to and including *AE 1974*)**

It is within Levinas’s middle period that his conception of forgiveness receives its most substantive and extended development. Rather than simply existing as passing isolated references within the works, starting in 1961 with the publication of *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas begins to address forgiveness as a central topic of concern, a trend in concert with attempts throughout Levinas’s later works to bring his philosophy to bear in more engaged historical or political contexts. In this middle period two crucial texts dominate the Levinasian exposition of pardon. First, in *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas addresses in greater depth the sense of pardon as an existential apparatus. In this middle period, pardon functions in this existential manner *because* of its fundamental tie to the concrete other. Tied to moral fault and inseparable from memory, even the possibility of pardon herein is realized in the practical moment of contact with the Other, an interaction that demonstrates the ability of the phenomenon to reverse or reorder time itself. And yet, as we will see, pardon as an existential apparatus exists as a possible outcome of interpersonal encounter, not a necessary or naturally following one as was the case in the early period. Second, in his first published Talmudic lecture of 1963, Levinas addresses directly the specific details and requirements of interpersonal pardon. Within this text unique to the Levinasian corpus wherein pardon becomes the central topic of discussion, Levinas frames the phenomenon fundamentally as an act of recognition. It is one which is given by the victim alone as gift, but only after the injured party has been appeased and justice ensured. Perhaps most interesting in this middle period, as we shall see, is, however, Levinas’s claim at the end of the
Talmudic lecture that while vengeance remains a right of the injured, it is nonetheless a right which ought not be pursued strictly, thereby suggesting that justice must be tempered with recognition of the other, a claim represented in the remarkable biblical woman of Rizpah with which Levinas ends the lecture.

While many crucial ideas concerning pardon certainly can be found throughout the early texts, it is with the advent of *Totalité et Infini* in Levinas’s middle period, however, that one finds some of the richest resources. In this key text, we find Levinas beginning to develop a theory of pardon which goes beyond an original existential need to include the interpersonal aspects of pardon as recovery from and response to harm. Published in 1961, the work contains sixteen references, four to the verbal form, and twelve to the noun which occur in two brief passages. In the first, Levinas writes:

Les volitions de la volonté ne pèsant pas sur elle et de la juridiction à laquelle elle s’ouvre vient le pardon, la puissance d’effacer, de délier, de défaire l’histoire. La volonté se meut ainsi entre sa trahison et sa fidélité qui, simultanées, décrivent l’originalité même de son pouvoir. Mais la fidélité n’oublie pas la trahison – et la volonté religieuse reste rapport avec Autrui. La fidélité se conquiert par le repentir et la prière – parole privilégiée dans laquelle la volonté quête sa fidélité à soi – et le pardon qui lui assure cette fidélité lui vient du dehors. Le bon droit du vouloir intérieur, sa certitude d’être vouloir incompris, révèle donc encore une relation avec l’extériorité. La volonté en attand l’investiture et le pardon. Elle l’attend d’une volonté extérieure, mais dont elle ne ressentirait plus le heurt, mais le jugement; d’une extériorité soustraite à l’antagonisme des volontés, soustraite à l’histoire. Cette possibilité de justification et de pardon en tant que conscience religieuse où l’intériorité tend à coïncider avec être, souvre en face d’Autrui à qui je peux parler. (*TeI* 207.33-208.11)

The volitions of the will do not weigh on it [the will], and from the jurisdiction to which it opens comes pardon, the power to efface, to absolve, to undo history. The will thus moves between its betrayal and its fidelity which, simultaneous, describes the very originality of its power. But the fidelity does not forget the betrayal – and the religious will remains a relation with the Other. Fidelity is won by repentance and prayer (a privileged word in which the will seeks its fidelity to itself); and the pardon which ensures it this fidelity comes to it from the outside. Hence the rights of the inward will, its certitude of being a misunderstood will, still reveal a relation with exteriority. The will awaits its investiture and pardon. It awaits them from an exterior will but one from which it would experience no longer shock but judgment, an exteriority withdrawn from the antagonism of wills, withdrawn from history. This possibility of justification and pardon, as religious consciousness in which interiority tends to coincide with being, opens before the Other, to whom I can speak. (*TaI* 231.23-38)
This passage discussing pardon and the will from Section III (Le visage et l’extériorité), Subsection C (La relation éthique et le temps), of Totalité et Infini falls within Part 2, entitled “Le commerce, la relation historique et le visage” wherein Levinas outlines the encounter of the interior will (which, following Section II, is established chez soi) with the radical possibility of alterity embodied as the Other (Autrui). It is in the opening of the will toward alterity, toward the Other, that the possibility of pardon ensues. This is a direct result of the fact that the Other serves a role both as originator of the law, and as the agent transgressed. As Levinas writes, pardon emerges from the jurisdiction of the will precisely because that same juris-diction (speaking-the law) is established through encounter with the other. The Other is she who ‘speaks the law’ through the command written upon her face, the hineni, the “here I am,” which is a primordial call for recognition, acknowledgment, and protection. Thus establishing the law through command, this same event likewise establishes the possibility of pardon for instances where that command is transgressed. As was the case in De l’existence à l’existant, the possibility of pardon arises at precisely the same moment as the establishment of ethical responsibility, herein represented as arising in the precise moment of the turning of the will toward the exterior, toward the Other. This notion is echoed in the final sentence of this passage where Levinas ties together the twin possibilities of justification (the state of one under the command of the Other) and pardon as both opening before the Other.

The possibility of pardon, like the possibility of responsibility is therefore one qui du dehors, which comes from the outside, from that which is set apart from the will. Pardon is expressed then as that which arises from the exterior, the ultimate and absolute exterior that is

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77 Tal, “Exteriority and the Face” in Lingis, trans.
79 Tal, “Commerce, the Historical Relation, and the Face” in Lingis, trans.
80 lit. “at home with itself.”
represented as the bearer of ethics, the Other. It is for this reason Levinas writes in this passage quoted above, “La volonté en attend l’investiture et le pardon. Elle l’attend d’une volonté extérieure....” / “The will awaits its investiture and pardon. It awaits them from an exterior.” In the response to the Other, the will finds its investiture, it takes upon itself the insignia which mark the responsibility of its office as an ethical persona; and simultaneously it finds its own pardon, herein meant to denote the primordial pardon – or at least the possibility thereof – for its guilt incurred precisely as a being chez soi who is nonetheless always before the Others.

And this primordial sense of pardon is particularly tied to the idea which began the passage, that pardon is “la puissance d’effacer, de délier, de défaire l’histoire,” “the power to efface, to untie, to undo history.” The use of délier at this juncture is somewhat curious. Though délier is correctly rendered as ‘absolve’ in the Lingis translation, one must wonder why Levinas did not use the French correlative term absoudre, rather than délier. A possibility may be the traditional religious context in which absoudre and absolution find usage, within Roman Catholic discussions of absolution wherein the guilt of the offending sin is removed. This traditional usage would seem to be in concert with the prior term effacer, which carries this same connotation of erasure. And it is clear that both the etymologies of absoudre and délier derive from meanings of ‘to loosen.’ The critical differentiation here is possibly that the terms effacer, délier and défaire are intended to refer precisely to history, to the totality of being represented therein, rather than to the sin which would have suggested the use of absoudre. The intended object is clarified by avoiding the more religious term. There is, of course, no certainty in the revelation of the intent behind this choice. Yet, it becomes clear nonetheless that the aim at this first exposition is not so much in any form of manumission from sin, but rather to suggest that pardon, as uniquely arriving from the exterior copresent with the responsibility enacted in the
command, bears the unique ability to rupture the totality of being itself. Pardon then, like responsibility, like the Other herself, is exactly that which possesses the power to rupture the totality of being and explore new possibilities in human interaction.

The second passage which addresses pardon within *Totalité et Infini* is a key passage as well, and though brief is one of the only passages wherein Levinas discusses pardon directly in a philosophical context. It is also one of the only places wherein pardon represents the primary subject of discussion, and does not appear merely as a secondary concept. Levinas transitions to the discussion of the pardon from his analysis of fecundity wherein he claims that fecundity renders possible a pardoned existence (*TeI* 259.18 / *TaI* 282.38). He argues that through the long arc of futurity made possible by fecundity, the beginning-again, the “recommencement” found within fecundity is itself a pardon (*TeI* 259.20 / *TaI* 282.38). Levinas is here suggesting that the extreme infinitude of responsibility is only potentially fulfilled within the parallel indefinite future of fecundity. Levinas establishes here the enactment of responsibility as the necessitating condition for pardon. To what extent, however, can this condition be met? Need one therefore assume the infinity of a fecund future to enable its possibility? It would seem that the key herein is not the assurance of a fecund future, of a future in which responsibility will be fulfilled completely, but the hope in a future wherein the two might coincide. Whether such a future might in fact ever arrive, or remains ever ‘to come’ (a deeply Derridean question) remains unclear at this juncture. Yet it is precisely due to such difficulties which circulate within the notion of time and its role within forgiveness that Levinas next addresses what he terms the “paradox of time” in this central passage:

Le pardon dans son sens immédiat se rattache au phénomène moral de la faute; le paradoxe du pardon tient à la rétroaction et, du point de vue du temps vulgaire, il représente une inversion de l’ordre naturel des choses, la réversibilité du temps. Elle comporte plusieurs aspects. Le pardon se réfère à l’instant écoulé, il permet au sujet qui s’était commis dans un instant écoulé d’être comme
Pardon in its immediate sense is connected with the moral phenomenon of fault. The paradox of pardon lies in its retroaction; from the point of view of common time it represents an inversion of the natural order of things, the reversibility of time. It involves several aspects. Pardon refers to the instant elapsed; it permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on, to be as though he had not committed himself. Active in a stronger sense than forgetting, which does not concern the reality of the event forgotten, pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it. But in addition, forgetting nullifies the relations with the past, whereas pardon conserves the past pardoned in the purified present. The pardoned being is not the innocent being. The difference does not justify placing innocence above pardon; it permits the discerning in pardon of a surplus of happiness, the strange happiness of reconciliation, the felix culpa, given in an everyday experience which no longer astonishes us. The paradox of the pardon of fault refers to pardon as constitutive of time itself. The instants do not link up with one another indifferently, but extend from the other unto me. The future does not come to me from a swarming of indistinguishable possibles which would flow toward my present and which I would grasp; it comes to me from across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other absolutely Other — though he be my son — is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past. (Tel 259.22-260.7)

In this central passage, Levinas notes a number of key aspects of his understanding of pardon. First, pardon is immediately connected with moral fault, a moral failure which Levinas has already tied to the very nature of a totalizing being itself. Second, pardon acts uniquely in time. Retroactively it aims to invert the natural order, to enact “the reversibility of time.” Pardon acts upon time in order to rewrite history, to unsettle the totality of a history of forward marching being which seeks to encompass all within its purview. In this aspect, Levinas is echoing the earlier passage just discussed. Third, pardon is intimately tied to memory. It represents an erasure of the past event, as if the agent had not committed the act. And yet, critically, this is not to imply that one acts as if the event itself did not transpire. As Levinas writes, stronger than forgetting, which cannot focus on the reality of a forgotten event, pardon instead focus on the
events themselves. Pardon is therefore an erasure of the guilt of the act, thus a purification of the past, while simultaneously preserving the memory of the event itself. This has the important consequence of preserving the past act within the present, bringing the event to an eternal presence even as the guilt accrued to the act is mitigated into a form of reconciliation, into what Levinas terms the “strange happiness of reconciliation.” The crime is neither erased nor forgotten – “Pardoned being is not innocent being” – and in the felix culpa even the greatest horrors and atrocities are preserved but precisely in their purified form. The burdens of the past, and the lessons the might teach, are therefore carried forward into an eternal present within which persons encounter one another in the full light of ethical responsibility.

This paradox of time leads directly to the final aspect of pardon revealed in this passage, that, fourth, the paradox of pardon points to a construction of time in which the position of the Other is determinative. In the final lines of this passage, Levinas notes that the responsibility which is undertaken in the pardon renders the pardon itself constitutive of the structure of time. For it is only through the reordering of the past purified in a constant present by the approach of the Other, an approach from “across an absolute interval,” that any discernable future might arrive. And it is in light of this very possibility that Levinas can note that through the discontinuity of present moments (Tel 260.23) a future is possible in the pardon itself. The key differentiation, however, at this juncture is that the future is not that which the self might grasp and form for itself in a new totality, but in a rather Husserlian moment, the future is the only real alterity which might arrive. And for Levinas, in the passage above it is clear that very future is ordered by the command of alterity itself, even the most intimate alterity of the product of fecundity, which always arrives from “l’autre rive et d’y renouer avec le passé” / “from the other shore and from there connects with the past” (or ‘reties’ itself to the past). At this final moment
the imagery returns full circle and the progression from *délier* (‘to loosen’) in the earlier passage to the sense of *renouer* as ‘to retie’ is complete. In the pardon history is both loosened and tied back together, the fabric is unwoven and rewoven at the same moment, out of the same strands but in a new fashion. In the pardon the acts of the past maintain the unique ability not to undermine, but to strengthen the bonds of ethical responsibility.

In his discussion on Kierkegaard in the 1963 article “Kierkegaard: Existence et Éthique,” published in Noms Propres (1976) Levinas again makes clear this connection between recognition and forgiveness. He writes:

Dans le croyance, l’existence cherche la reconnaissance comme la conscience chez Hegel. Elle lute pour cette reconnaissance en quêtant le pardon et le salut. (NP 104.5)

In belief, existence seeks recognition, as does consciousness for Hegel. It struggles for that recognition by begging for forgiveness and salvation. (PN 70.16)

Though at this juncture Levinas is still in the process of questioning Kierkegaard’s system of thought, his claim concerning belief and existence is nonetheless straightforward. Existence seeks recognition through forgiveness. Once again, we see a direct tie between the concept of forgiveness and that of recognition, and simultaneously another iteration of Levinas’s early notion that existence itself is in need of forgiveness. The internally enwrapped ego bound by *conatus essendi* is by definition one that is in need of redemption for Levinas, a redemption that can only come through encounter with the Other. For it is only this encounter, which is fundamentally an act of recognition, that allows the possibility of forgiveness (the restoration of ethical responsibility) as well as salvation (the institution of justice which frees the individual from the condemning injustice that is the “freedom” of autonomy).

The interpersonal element which is revealed in such a moment of recognition signifies as well a shift in the corpus toward a more practical concern with the details of how forgiveness

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81 Originally published in German in *Schweizer Monatshefte* (1976).
functions within actual human interaction. Delivered in 1963 and published in 1968, the first Talmudic Lecture of *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* remains within the Levinasian corpus the single most sustained (and one of the only extended) discussions of his conception of forgiveness. The term not only appears in the text more than a hundred times, but in a rare moment in Levinas’s works, is the very theme itself.\(^82\) And while it is the Talmudic Lecture included in *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* that is most often referred to as the core and genesis of Levinasian notions of pardon, I contend that the work in *QLT* is an attempt to engage and form a set of ideas that are already present within the Levinasian corpus, from the very earliest of the published books. It is the transition from a necessary connection between responsibility and pardon (for rectification of existential fault derived from being itself) to pardon as an interpersonal possibility aimed at rectifying harm between individuals that arises from responsibility, a concept that becomes most clear in *QLT* itself. In both cases however, as was made clear by Levinas’s analysis of the effect upon time of pardon in *Totalité et Infini*, what is under discussion is not merely pardon as a reaction or response to moral or criminal wrongdoing, but rather a detailed account of the transcendental structures of pardon, herein ordered by both time and encounter.

As Levinas notes in his 1968 introduction to *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, the central concern of the first Talmudic lesson is “le pardon du crime irrémissible” (*QLT* 9.11). While translated in the English edition of *Nine Talmudic Readings*\(^83\) as “forgiving the unforgivable crime” (*9TR* 3.8) the French here is instructive. The French term used herein is *irrémissible*, which while translated typically in English as “unforgivable” is derived from a different cognate

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\(^82\) The Lecture contains 106 references (62 noun, 37 verb, and 7 references to the Hebrew term for forgiveness, *Techouva*.

\(^83\) *Nine Talmudic Readings* (1990) is the English translation of both *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques* and the additional five Talmudic Lectures published by Levinas as *Du Sacré au Saint*. 
in the French. *Ir-rémissible* is therefore that which is beyond remission, a term used both in religious contexts concerning the remission of sin, and medically in terms of the remission of disease. In this single term therefore we see some of the transition in thought expressed in Levinas’s early texts, wherein the self, bound by the need for forgiveness due to its existential status as *Ego* likewise suffers from this status much as an individual suffers from a disease. To be forgiven, then, involves restoring (even if for the first time) the individual to a state of health wherein it finds wholeness *through* its responsibility to the Other. The enduring question in light of this, therefore, and one which Levinas will undertake in this crucial Talmudic Lecture, is whether there are any acts which fall beyond that which might be rectified, restored, healed, forgiven.

As we thus turn toward this Talmudic reading itself, we must remember that Levinas’s 1963 Talmudic reading entitled “Envers Autrui” (“Toward the Other”) is one of the only places in the Levinasian corpus to receive an extended discussion of the notion of pardon. As such, this work merits special attention. Framed as a reading of and response to a passage from the Tractate *Yoma* (85a-85b), the commentary is a discourse on a Mishna\(^8\) passage that reads:

> Les fautes de l’homme envers Dieu sont pardonnées par le Jour du Pardon; les fautes de l’homme envers Autrui ne lui sont pas pardonnées par le Jour du Pardon, à moins que, au préalable, il n’ait apaisé Autrui. (*QLT* 29.3)\(^9\)

> The transgressions of man toward God are forgiven him by the Day of Atonement; the transgressions against other people are not forgiven him by the Day of Atonement if he has not first appeased the other person. (*9TR* 12.3)

As is often the case in such Talmudic texts, the Gemara\(^5\) commentary that follows includes several distinct but related stories. First, the Gemara offers an explanation by Rabbi Joseph bar

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\(^8\) In Jewish tradition, the Mishna represents the Oral Torah, believed to be revealed on Sinai. It was redacted and compiled circa 200 CE.

\(^9\) In Jewish tradition the Gemara represents the earliest rabbinical commentaries on the Mishna. Together with the Mishna passages they comprise the Talmud, itself typically published with the later commentaries from following centuries as well as with Rashi’s medieval commentary. The Talmud is noteworthy in that rather than
Helbe in reference to 1 Samuel 2 that essentially restates the Mishna passage, supported by both the commentary of Rabbi Isaac and Rab Jose bar Hanina. In each presentation it is emphasized that faults committed toward another person cannot be forgiven by God until and unless the offending party has appeased the offended party, even if the fault committed is in word alone (Rabbi Isaac’s commentary). Rab Jose bar Hanina adds in the text that one should not ask forgiveness more than three times, referencing the Biblical story in Genesis of Joseph’s brothers begging forgiveness from Joseph following the death of Jacob. Second, at this juncture in the Gemara, a story follows explaining a situation where Rab had an altercation with a slaughterer of livestock and the slaughterer did not come to Rab to seek forgiveness on the eve of Yom Kippur. At this point Rab goes to attempt to reconcile with the man, who, upon refusing to reconcile with Rab, is killed by a projectile fragment of displaced bone. The text labels this as murder. The third and final story from the Gemara commentary details a situation where a teacher is interrupted repeatedly while teaching. When Rab (who is teaching) finally refuses to go back and repeat the text, Rab Hanina bar Hama is offended. For thirteen years Rab seeks forgiveness but Rab Hanina refuses to be appeased and therefore does not forgive. In its explanation of why Rab asked for forgiveness thirteen times rather than the previously prescribed three, the Gemara claims that Rabbi Hanina refuses to be appeased because of a dream in which he learned that Rab was destined for sovereignty, but only if he left to become a teacher in Babylon. The passage claims that this is the reason Rabbi Hanina refuses to be appeased.

It is into this context that Levinas ventures as he begins his explanation of the Talmudic texts. The central concept at play herein is the need for rectification between injured parties.
In his commentary on the Mishna passage Levinas notes how important he believes it to be that forgiveness be given a set date and time to occur, herein referencing the centrality in the Jewish calendar of Yom Kippur (QLT 35.25 / 9TR 15.39). He then clearly notes that that forgiveness cannot transpire between persons without appeasement. Levinas writes:

le pardon ne se sépare précisément pas de contrition ni de penitence, d’abstinence et de jeûnes, d’engagements pour le Mieux. (QLT 36.5)

forgiveness cannot be separated either from contrition or from repentance, or from abstinence, fasts, or commitments made for the Better. (9TR 16.4)

The ability to be forgiven then, to a degree, rests with the offending party as much as with the offended party (QLT 36.27 / 9TR 16.19). And as an event which transpires in time, pardon requires a clear moment in which it is realized. There will be no pardon if the offending party does not first engage the offended and seek restoration between them. And yet at the same time the other always retains the right to bestow, or not to bestow, forgiveness. On this point, Levinas is quite clear: “L’autre peut refuser le pardon et me laisser à tout jamais impardonné” / “the other can refuse forgiveness and leave me forever unforgiven” (QLT 37.3 / 9TR 16).

Forgiveness remains within this text something to be given, and whose givenness cannot be coerced or forced. On this point Levinas is painstakingly clear. He writes:

si un homme commet une faute à l’égard d’un homme, Dieu n’intervient pas. Il faut qu’un tribunal terrestre fasse justice entre homes! Il faut même plus que le reconciliation entre l’offenseur et l’offensé – il faut la justice et le juge. Et la sanction. Le drame du pardon ne comporte pas seulement deux personnages, mais trois. (QLT 41.18)

If a man commits a fault toward another man, God does not intervene. An earthly tribunal is necessary to create justice among men! Even more than a reconciliation between the offender and the offended is needed – justice and a judge are necessary. And sanctions. The drama of forgiveness involves not two players but three. (9TR 18.26)

The central distinction appearing here, and the one which guides the remainder of the piece is the differentiation between offenses committed against God and those committed against other persons. For those offenses committed against God, the Day of Atonement with its associated rituals is considered sufficient. For those offenses committed against another person,
however, forgiveness remains beyond the scope of that which God may bestow. At the same time, of course, Levinas is careful to note that offenses against other persons are also offenses against God, as violation of the law. To the extent that such offenses are offenses against God, Levinas argues that they may be forgiven, and yet the crime committed against the other cannot be simply elided; its force remains (QLT 37.20 / 9TR 16.36). He continues,

Il est donc très grave d’avoir offense un homme. Le pardon depend de lui, on se trouve entre ses mains. Pas de pardon qui ne fût demandé par le coupable! Il faut que le coupable reconnaisse sa faute; il faut que l’offenseille bien accueillir les supplications de l’offensant. Mieux encore: personne ne peut pardonner, si le pardon ne lui a pas été demandé par l’offensant, si le coupable n’a pas cherché à appaiser l’offensé. (QLT 42.28)

It is thus a very serious matter to offend another man. Forgiveness depends on him. One finds oneself in his hands. There can be no forgiveness that the guilty party has not sought! The guilty party must recognize his fault. The offended party must want to receive the entreaties of the offending party. Further, no person can forgive if forgiveness has not been asked him by the offender, if the guilty party has not tried to appease the offended. (9TR 19.15)

His point herein, one dominant throughout this text, is that without interpersonal rectification, which is framed a number of times as justice, there can be no forgiveness. Levinas even suggests that:

Dieu n’est peut-être que ce refus permanent d’une histoire qui s’arrangerait de nos larmes privées. (QLT 44.21)

God is perhaps nothing but this permanent refusal of a history which would come to terms without our private tears. (9TR 20.10)

God, in Levinas’s thought represented as the truly infinite other, is itself the ultimate resistance to a world that knows no justice, serving to eternally refocus the attention on the need that the individual be honored. So insistent upon the need for appeasing the other is Levinas that he is willing at this juncture to define theism itself in terms of the need for direct individual encounter that refuses to forget or elide the harms of the past.

At the same time however, justice is not a simple matter of non-related good deeds outweighing evil ones. Levinas is careful to note that there exists no direct correlation between these events:
Les mérites et les fautes n’entrent pas dans une comptabilité anonyme pour s’y annuler ou pour s’y additionner. Ils existent personnels, c’est à dire incommensurables, et exigent chacun son propre règlement. (QLT 60.7)

Merits and faults do not enter into an anonymous bookkeeping, either to annul each other or to increase one another. They exist individually. That is, they are incommensurable, and each requires its own settlement. (9TR 27.25)

It is this “settlement” that brings the discussion of pardon into one of justice. For the consequences when one fails to ensure justice are indeed profound. Levinas writes clearly, “La paix ne s’installe pas dans un monde sans consolations” / “Peace does not dwell in a world without consolations” (QLT 44.23 / 9TR 20.11). Without individual attention to the rectification of the harm committed against another, or at least an attempt so to do (both of which may be viewed as the initiation of justice), Levinas is clear that there can be no peace within the world.

The impossibility of such peace, however, is not merely a rhetorical flourish. And this impossibility becomes clear when we examine Levinas’s choice to refer to the biblical story of Joseph, a story he returns to a number of times over his career. 86 The choice of the Talmudic text

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86 Humanisme de l’autre homme, published in 1972, contains a single reference in a footnote, which is itself a reference to the same story of Joseph that appears in QLT. Comprising three essays exploring signification, in this work Levinas explores his continuing problem of the incessant reduction of the saying (‘Dire’) into the said (‘Dit’), and the need for the presentation of a pure saying that resists reduction, or in other words, the manifestation of the proximity of the Other. Levinas writes,

[La proximité] s’agit de la non-priorité du Même et, à travers toutes ces limitations, de la fin de l’actualité, comme si l’intempestif venait déranger les concordances de la re-présentation. Comme si une étrange faiblesse secouait de frissons et ébranlait la présence ou l’être en acte. Passivité plus passive que la passivité conjointe de l’acte, laquelle aspire encore à l’acte de toutes ses puissances. Inversion de la synthèse en patience et du discours en voix de «subtil silence» faisant signe à Autrui – au prochain c’est à dire à l’inenglobable. Faiblesse sans lâcheté comme l’incalessence d’une pitié. Décharge de l’être qui se déprend. Les larmes c’est peut-être cela. Défaillance de l’être tombant en humanité, qui n’a pas été jugée digne de retenir l’attention des philosophes. Mais la violence qui ne serait pas se sanglot réprimé ou qui l’aurait étranglé pour toujours, n’est même pas de la race de Caïn; elle est fille de Hitler ou sa fille adoptive. (HAH 14.26)

4 «Pardonne de grâce l’offense de tes frères et leurs faute et le mal qu’ils t’ont fait»… Joseph pleura lorsqu’on lui parla ainsi… Genèse, 50, 17.” (HAH 105.11-12)

[Proximity] means the non-priority of the Same and, through all these limitations, it means the end of actuality; as if the inopportune came to disturb the concordances of representation. As if a strange weakness caused presence or being-in-action to shiver and topple. Passivity more passive than the conjoint passivity of the act, which still aspires to the actualization of all its potentials. Synthesis inverted into patience and discourse turned into a voice of ‘subtle silence’ making a sign to Others – to the fellow man, that is, the unencompassable. Weakness without cowardice, like the
to reference the Joseph story from Genesis is therefore one which is particularly instructive for Levinas. The story is a central one because it establishes for Levinas “le prototype de l’offense, par toute offense… imité” / “the prototypical offense, imitated by all offenses” (QLT 49.6 / 9TR 22.14). The Joseph story, of course, is one wherein the figure of Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, is sold into slavery by his brothers, themselves concerned about the potential for the power Joseph one day might hold, a potential revealed through the medium of dreams. The key herein for Levinas is that this offense amounts to “l’exploitation de l’homme par l’homme” / “the exploitation of man by man” (QLT 49.5 / 9TR 22.13). To reduce an other to mere status as an object that might be bought, sold, or used is to fail in the deepest ways to recognize the face of the other upon which the request for respect (the hineni) that initiates ethics is written. For Levinas, all offenses toward another are moments of exploitation that fail to recognize the integrity of the other. And it is for this exact reason that peace without the cessation of exploitation and the commencement of rectification is utterly impossible.

In order to adequately provide rectification, however, the offending party must possess a fullness of knowledge that Levinas questions to be possible. He writes,

L’offensé peut accorder le pardon, quand l’offensant a pris conscience de son tort. (QLT 55.2)
The offended party can grant forgiveness when the offender has become conscious of the wrong he has done. (9TR 25.2)

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incalescence of pity. Discharge of a being who lets go of himself. Perhaps that is what tears are.\(^4\)
The swoon of fainting into humanity, not deemed worthy of the attention of philosophers. But the violence that would not be this repressed sigh or would have strangled it forever does not even belong to the race of Cain; it is the daughter of Hitler, or his adopted daughter. (HO 6.17-31)

\(^4\)‘Forgive for pity’s sake the offense of your brothers and their fault and the evil they have done.’ Hearing these words, Joseph wept…” (Genesis 50:17). (HO 71.11-12)

This passage establishes a direct connection between proximity and pity. Joseph weeps at the command which is guised as coming from his deceased father. Note that the voice of the other speaking is relayed from one deceased, a (re)enacting of responsibility after death.
Perhaps one of the most difficult realities of harm – particularly profound harm – is that its consequences are rarely immediately known. They have, rather, a tendency to deepen with time.

It is in full recognition of this difficulty that Levinas nonetheless writes,

Deux conditions au pardon: le bon vouloir de l’offensé, la pleine conscience de l’offensant. (QLT 55.22)

there are two conditions for forgiveness: the good will of the offended party and the full awareness of the offender. (9TR 25.17)

Good will and the desire to seek forgiveness are both potentially relatively easily achieved. “La pleine conscience” (“full awareness”), a term which in French brings together moral conscience and conscious awareness, is less easily achieved. If, then, the fullness of the harm committed can only be known in a deferred and imperfect future, Levinas asks quite genuinely,

l’offensant est-il à même de mesurer l’étendue de ses torts? ….avons-nous véritablement le pouvoir de solliciter le pardon? (QLT 55.7)

Is the offender capable of measuring the extent of his wrongdoing? ….Do we therefore truly have the capacity to ask for forgiveness (9TR 25.6)

As we have seen, for Levinas there can be, by definition, no full knowledge of the effects of wrongdoing. He writes,

Nos torts nous apparaissent au fur et à mesure où nous faisons acte d’humilité. La recherché du pardon n’est jamais achevée. QLT 53.18

Our wrongs appear to us as we humble ourselves. The seeking forgiveness never comes to an end. (9TR 24.18)

It is only in the dialogical process of humbling oneself, thereby entering into conversation with the other who has been harmed, that one begins to fully understand the actions committed. In this text, Levinas attempts to resolve this through a process approach whereby forgiveness is ongoing. There remains in this text, however, an ambiguity between his presentation of forgiveness as an event transpiring in a set moment in time, and that of forgiveness as an eternally continuing process.
Whether existing as an event or as a process, one may ask, nonetheless, whether there exist certain offenses which are so heinous as to exist beyond the possibility of pardon.\(^7\) As he relates the concluding moments of the story of Rab, Levinas writes,

> Il n’a jamais pardonné. L’histoire est finie…. Il existe des orders où l’offense serait irremissible. Ce qui signifie surtout: il existe des orders où nous sommes tenus à la plus grand circonspection. Rav le juste a pu ne pas obtenir son pardon. (\textit{QLT} 52.17)

> He never forgave. This is the end of the story…. There are levels on which an offense would be unforgivable, which means above all that there are levels which require of us the greatest introspection. Rab the just could be refused a pardon.” (\textit{9TR} 23.38)

 Forgiveness is never, therefore, a guarantee, even when the offended party is willing to do everything required. This is explicitly because “la seule victim appartient le droit de pardoner” / “the right to forgive belongs only to the victim” (\textit{QLT} 58.27 / \textit{9TR} 26.40). The victim always retains the right to forgive, or not to forgive. In his discussion, Levinas claims that the reason such a wrong cannot be forgiven is precisely because Rab has offended his master. As he notes, “la situation est exceptionelle” / “the situation is exceptional” (\textit{QLT} 53.13 / \textit{9TR} 24.14). And yet, perhaps it is not exceptional at all. Or perhaps better stated, it is the case that all such situations are exceptional as they draw us out of ordinary experience and into encounter. It is for this reason that in rather typical fashion Levinas asks, “autrui n’est-il pas toujours à un degré quelconque votre maître?” / “isn’t the other… always to some degree your master?” (\textit{QLT} 53.15 / \textit{9TR} 24.16). As the initiator of ethics and responsibility, the other for Levinas, is always she to whom one is always already beholden, or in his own term, held “hostage.”

 For those crimes that can be forgiven, Levinas is careful to note that the demand for justice (already articulated) goes beyond ordinary recompense to include even rather gruesome or horrifying acts of vengeance. To this end, and in reference to 1 Samuel 21, Levinas discusses the story of Saul and the Gibeonites mentioned in the Talmudic passage. He notes the

\(^7\) Levinas notes clearly that it would be difficult, for example, to forgive Heidegger for his association with National Socialism. (\textit{QLT} 56.7 / \textit{9TR} 25.27).
Gibeonites’ demand of David for compensation for the wrongs committed against them by Saul.

The Talmudic and Biblical texts at this juncture are quite clear that the right of vengeance remains and is not to be overlooked or underestimated.

A une victim qui crie justice, même si cette justice est cruelle, David ne saurait resister. A celui qui exige «vie pour vie», David répond «je donnerai». (QLT 61.21)

David is not able to oppose a victim who cries out for justice, even if this justice is cruel. To the one who demands ‘a life for a life,’ David answers, ‘I shall give.’ (9TR 28.13)

And so he does. In recompense for the harms committed, David gives over to the Gibeonites two sons of Rizpah (Saul’s concubine), and five sons of Michal (Saul’s wife). The seven princes, after being given over to the Gibbeonites, are killed by nailing their bodies to a rock. In this instance the right of vengeance extends even beyond the individuals directly involved to include their children as well. Profound guilt, it would seem for Levinas, exists beyond temporal limitations. He writes,

Punir les engant pour les fautes des parents est moins effroyable que le tolérer l’impunité quand l’étranger est offense. Que les passants le sachent; en Israël les princes meurent de mort horrible, parce que les étrangers furent offenses par le souverain. (QLT 60.28)

To punish children for the faults of their parents is less dreadful than to tolerate impunity when the stranger is injured. Let passersby know this: in Israel, princes die a horrible death because strangers were injured by the sovereign. (9TR 27.41)

Impunity – which creates a world without consequence or justice – becomes herein the greatest crime imaginable. For it is the complete representation of true exploitation, an exploitation that cannot even recognize itself as exploitation. The right of vengeance as that which serves to prevent impunity, therefore, exists. But, Levinas asks, ought it to be claimed?

Le Talmud nous enseigne qu’on ne peut obliger au pardon les hommes qui exigent la justice du talion. Il nous enseigne qu’Israël ne conteste pas aux autres ce droit imprescriptible. Mais il nous enseigne surtout que si Israël reconnaît ce droit, il ne le demande pas pour lui-même, qu’être d’Israël c’est ne pas le revendiquer. (QLT 63.12)

The Talmud teaches that one cannot force men who demand retaliatory justice to grant forgiveness. It reaches us that Israel does not deny this imprescriptible right to others. But it teaches us above all that if Israel recognizes this right, it does not ask for it itself and that to be Israel is not to claim it.” (9TR 28.43)
For Levinas, to be Israel, to be a chosen people in a promised land, a people that dwells with the infinite (as do all those who have the capacity to see the face of the other) is to recognize higher duties than retaliation.\textsuperscript{88} The move herein is to favor restorative over strict punitive justice revealed in the notion that no matter who this other before you may be, regardless of the horrifying things s/he may have done, s/he remains an Other, a manifestation of infinity to whom one owes respect.

It is what happens at this juncture of the story, however, that is one of the most instructive moments in the entire Levinasian commentary. For it is to the image if Rizpah, this remarkable woman too easily overlooked in the 1 Samuel text, that Levinas turns. He writes,

Mais Ritspa, fille de Aya, resta auprès des cadavres depuis la saison des prémices d’orge (depuis le lendemain de Pessah) jusqu’aux premières pluies (époque de Souccoth): chaque soir elle recouvrait de sacs les corps de suppliciés, les protégeant des oiseaux du ciel et des bêtes des champs... (QLT 58.14)

But Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, stayed with the corpses from the season of the first fruits of barley (from the day after Passover) until the first rains (the time of Succoth). Each evening she covered the bodies of the tortured with bags, protecting them from the birds of the air and the beasts of the fields. (9TR 26.29).

It is this woman to whom Levinas turns his full attention at the conclusion of the commentary: the woman, not even married to Saul but rather a concubine, who refuses to look away from the horrors which have transpired. \textit{She} is the one who seeks to preserve the dignity even of those who have been brutally murdered in an attempt to provide vengeance and restitution. \textit{She} waits day and night, covering the bodies in the evening so as to preserve them from damage by wild animals. \textit{She} is the one who ensures that all present \textit{must} view the horrors transpired. There is no forgetting them and there is no lessening of the horror. For \textit{six months} she lovingly waits with the

\textsuperscript{88} This same distinction between a justice marked by forgiveness and a justice replete with vengeance reappears in Levinas’s 1966 Talmudic Lecture entitled “Vieux comme le monde” / “As Old as the World?” in Levinas’s discussion of the differentiation between the justice of Zeus and the justice of the Eumenides as presented in Aeschylus’s \textit{Eumenides}. See QLT 165.25 / 9TR 77.31 and QLT 166.9 / 9TR 77.4. See also: Aeschylus, \textit{Eumenides}, ed. Alan H. Sommerstein, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
dead, herself clearly believing that her responsibilities to her children and to those beyond her own family extend beyond the temporal moment of death. At the end of the argument, wherein forgiveness requires knowledge of the events that transpired and acts of recompense, wherein forgiveness is never a guarantee, and wherein the right of vengeance is clearly established while simultaneously discouraged, she is the image that persists. Rizpah, the mourning mother. Levinas concludes the commentary with the following:

Et ce qui reste… c’est l’image de cette femme, de cette mère, de cette Ritspa Bath Aya qui, pendant six mois, monte le garde auprès des cadavres de ses fils, mêlés aux cadavres de ceux qui ne sont pas ses fils, pour preserver des oiseaux du ciel et des bêtes des champs, les victi
ms de l’implacable justice des homes et de Dieu. Ce qui reste après tant de sang et de larmes verses au nom de principes immortels, c’est l’abnegation individuelle qui, parmi les rebondissements dialectiques de la justice et tous ses revirements contradictoires, trouve, sans hesitations, une voie droite et sûre. (QLT 63.19)

what remains… is the image of this woman, this mother, this Rizpah Bat Aiah, who, for six months watches over the corpses of her sons, together with the corpses that are not her sons, to keep from the birds of the air and the beasts of the fields, the victims of the implacable justice of men and of God. What remains after so much blood and tears shed in the name of immortal principles is individual sacrifice, which, amidst the dialectical rebounds of justice and all its contradictory about-faces, without any hesitation, finds a straight and sure way” (9TR 29.6)

What remains in the wake of so much bloodshed is the compassionate unfailing mother who refuses to look away from the horrors she has witnessed, who refuses to forget or minimize what has transpired, refuses to forget “the victims of the implacable justice of men and of God.”

Justice and vengeance are indeed rights, but ones which ought be undertaken intentionally and carefully. Individual sacrifice represented here in acts of acknowledgment and respect is what remains: the act of recognition inherent in the sacrificial attention provided by Rizpah. And it is to this remarkable woman that we will return as we turn later in this chapter toward the Rwandan context, particularly in reference to the likewise tempered justice represented in the Gacaca trials.
In an article from 1963 entitled “La trace de l’autre,” Levinas continues to inquire after the same kind of true moments of encounter seen in the latter parts of the _QLT_ article we have just examined, particularly seeking to understand how moments of contact between truly different and distinct individuals are possible. In “La trace de l’autre,” Levinas discusses the possibility of whether that which is truly alterior would ever be able to truly appear. Herein he notes that the other cannot arrive into my own understanding without renouncing the very alterity that defines its status as Autrui/Other (EDF 206.12-13). And yet, Levinas is clear that he seeks to describe – or manifest – the means by which the Other appears. He writes,

> La rupture de mon univers, c’était une nouvelle signification qui lui venait. Tout se comprend, se justifie, se pardonne. (EDf 206.21-23)

The rupture of my universe is a new signification of the one who has come. All is understood, justified, forgiven. (Moser trans. of EDe 206.21-23)

His resolution herein is that the other of being that establishes a new order, and – as will be the case in _Autrement qu’être_ – although it must arrive not merely as non-being, but as other than being. Again we see herein the echo from _EE_ wherein the originary state of solitude is (perhaps always already) insufficient. With the arrival of the Other also comes the rupture of my own universe, my way of ordering and defining the world, my own totality. And at the same moment, again, Levinas states that forgiveness enters the picture, once again as the kind of existential apparatus we have already seen.

In the article, “*Langage et proximité*” from the 1967 Vrin edition of *En Découvrant l’existence*, Levinas again discusses this seemingly inherent connection between responsibility and pardon. He writes:

> C’est de par la condition d’otage qu’il peut y avoir dans le monde pitié, compassion, pardon et proximité (même le peu qu’il y en a). (EDf 234.19-21)

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It is by reason of the state of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity (even the little there is). (CPP 124.12-14)

It is worthy of note first that this is a central moment in the text. This exact sentence also appears in Levinas’s article “La Substitution,” first presented on 30 November 1967 for the Faculté Universitaire St. Louis in Brussles which was a response to the 1964 Derridean critique of *Totalité et Infini* published by Derrida as “Violence and Metaphysics.” Further, the exact text reappears in Section IV of *Autrement qu’être,* 90 which, also titled “La Substitution,” is for Levinas the explicit genesis from which the larger work emerged. As such it is a passage that is neither transitory or peripheral, but rather one which lies at the center of his thought.

In this passage above Levinas makes an important clarification. It is by means of the state of being held hostage – which is always the fundamental condition of being ‘always-already’ responsible in Levinasian ethics as the consequence of the realities of human encounter – that there can be pardon within the world. He claims that being hostage, hence responsible, is thus the condition of the possibility of pardon. The conditional formulation here marks the difference between a necessary and possible ensuing of pardon from responsibility. This shift is a critical one within Levinas’s thought: within the earliest works pardon appears to inevitably arrive with all ethical responsibility, whereas by this middle period of his scholarship pardon becomes a possibility as a result of responsibility. As opposed to an inevitability, this possibility is a direct result of the fact that for Levinas, while one’s responsibility is never chosen but rather a reality of one’s status as an agent, one nonetheless always retains the choice whether to accept and act upon this responsibility, or to disregard and ignore it. To retain this choice is for Levinas, at the deepest levels, what it means to be human.

90 Minus the parenthetical, this exact passage reappears at AE 150.15 / OB 117.37.
In a return to some of the concerns of the QLT lecture from the beginning of the decade, in his 1967 piece entitled “Par-delà le dialogue”\(^9\) found within Altérité et transcendance, Levinas revisits the idea of who, properly, maintains the right to forgive. In a broader discussion of efforts to fight against anti-Semitism, he writes:

\[
\text{…personne d’entre nous ne peut guérir les stigmates de tant de brûlures, ni pardonner ni absoudre à la place de ceux qui sont morts. (AeT 95.19)}
\]

\[
\text{…no one among us can cure the stigmata of so many burns, nor pardon nor absolve in the place of those who have died. (AaT 81.23)}
\]

As found in earlier texts the claim once again concerns the proper agents involved in an act of forgiveness. As something that may only transpire between those agents directly involved and harmed in the situation, forgiveness therefore can never occur on behalf of a third party. For Levinas, there can be no cure, pardon, or absolution granted on behalf of the one who has died.\(^2\)

This unfailing dedication to the concrete individual is one which bears ontological consequences, as becomes clear in his 1969 talk entitled “Le Nom de Dieu d’après quelques textes talmudiques.”\(^3\) In Section 4, “The Name and its Meanings,” Levinas discusses whether all names of God contained in the Biblical text ought to be considered holy. At the conclusion of the

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92 In the same article, Levinas references pardon in the context of a discussion of Jules Isaac and the idea of Judeo-Christian friendship. Therein, he claims that it is the Christian focus on reconciliation for Isaac that makes friendship between Jews and Christians possible (from a Christian perspective), for without it “les Juifs ne pourraient accueillir l’amitié que comme une commiseration ou comme un pardon” / “Jews could only receive friendship as commiseration or as pardon” (AeT 97.19 / AaT 83.30). The implication is that without a notion of reconciliation, Christians would only be able to engage in friendship after “pardoning” Jews, presumably a reference to the common though mistaken notion that the Jewish people bore responsibility for the story of the Christian crucifixion. Lest we forget, of course, “Judaism” did not exist properly at the time, as rabbinical “Judaism” was as much a development of first century theological debates as was “Christianity.”
93 First appeared in the Actes of the Colloquium organized by the International Centre of Humanist Studies and the Institute of Philosophical Studies of Rome in 1969 under the title “L’analyse de langage théologique,” BV, ix. This text also contains a reference to pardon at ADV 150.09 to “le jour dit du Grand Pardon,” a terminological reference to the Day of Atonement in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. Another such reference occurs in the 1973 article “Idéologie et idéalisme, where in a footnote Levinas references the Day of Pardon (Yom Kippur), therein noting that in Talmudic literature, even a priest on the way to temple for Yom Kippur must stop to help bury a body based on the “mercifulness of truth” (DQVI 29.33).
section, he quotes Rabbi Yehouda who speaks in the name of Rav and makes the following claim concerning to whom the divine name is to be entrusted:

> «On ne confie le nom de quarante-deux lettres qu’à l’homme discret et humble et qui pardonne les offenses qu’on lui fait.» (ADV 154.35)
> “One only confides the forty-two letter name to the discreet and humble man who forgives the offenses that done to him.” (Moser trans) 94

Levinas then continues to note that “forgiving of offenses” is itself an inversion of the standard ontological subjectivity (ADV 154.35 / BV 124.14). This is precisely because the forgiveness of offenses involves acts of recognition which transpire prior to ontology, or beyond ontology. To engage in such an act of recognition through forgiveness is therefore of such importance and respect that it creates the kind of individual to which may be entrusted the fullness of the divine represented in the forty-two letter name. Put more simply, this is one instance where Levinas quite literally claims that to forgive beyond being is itself an act worth of the recognition of the divine.

Such acts of recognition, however, always likewise occur for Levinas within communities, a concern central to his 1972 Talmudic Lecture entitled “Et Dieu créa la femme,” published in Du Sacré au saint (1977). Levinas emphasizes therein the crucial importance of the community within Jewish life and practice. He discusses a Talmudic text wherein four exceptions are offered to mitigate blame in the case of the offense of “la supreme apostasie” / “extreme apostasy” (DSAS 147.3 / 9TR 176.17) that Levinas sees in the choice to remove oneself from active life in the Jewish community. He writes of the first exception, “On peut se révolter contre la synagogue à cause de l’intolérable fardeau que l’on porte” / “A person may rebel against a community because of the unbearable burden he bears” (DSAS 147.25 / 9TR 176.26) In

94 The English version of the same text reads, in a rather strange and free translation by Mole, “The 42 lettered name is entrusted to him who is pious, meek, middle-aged, free from bad temper, sober, and not insistence on his rights” (BV 124.12).
the context of Levinas’s discussion, ‘to rebel’ means to remove oneself from community. In this highly specified case Levinas then demands, “Pardonnons nous cette révolte!” / “Let us forgive this revolt!” DSAS 147.27 / 9TR 176.33). The implication herein is that one ought to forgive the removal of oneself from community in a situation where one bears an unbearable burden. Though this something of a passing reference, the point remains that as much as the intimate community is absolutely central (as we saw in the 1954 article “Le Moi et le totalité”), attention to the individual and her needs takes a place of precedence over the letter of the law. Consistent with his larger focus on responsibilities to individual Others over responsibilities to abstract legal duties that dominates much of the corpus, in this passage Levinas herein suggests in this request for forgiveness that the primary ethical act (and perhaps even the first act of community) again rests firmly in the response to the individual needs written on the face of the other.

In his final great work from the middle period, we once again see a return to the interrelated ideas of being and responsibility. Autrement qu'être ou a-delà de l'essence, published in 1974 as a major revision to Totalité et Infini and a response to Jacques Derrida’s “Violence et métaphysiques,” addresses pardon in only three places. As noted previously, the first reference is an exact repetition of a sentence that occurs earlier in the 1967 “Langage et Proximité” of EDE, noting the connection between the hostage state and the possibility of pardon as release from existential guilt (AE 150.15 / OB 117.37).

A second reference occurs in the context of Levinas’s discussion of the relationship between essence, responsibility, and freedom. Levinas’s argument herein is well-rehearsed: as essence fills every interval with its presence (thus creating a totality that eliminates the possibility of overflowing or alterity), it allows for no difference or innovation. In such a context,
as was the case in the passage from the 1952 “Simone Weil Contre la Bible,” a pardon without limit would disclaim the possibility of true freedom, which for Levinas is freedom from the totalization/domination of being and freedom to encounter the Other with responsibility. He writes, of such a complete freedom that would involve a gratuitous release of responsibility.

Cette gratuité pourrait être la distraction absolue du jeu sans conséquences, sans traces ni souvenir, d’un pur pardon. Ou au contraire responsabilité pour autrui et expiation. (AE 161.26-28)

This gratuity could be the absolute distraction of a play without consequences, without traces or memories, of a pure pardon. Or, it could be responsibility for another and expiation. (OB 125.32-34)

For Levinas, without the justice of consequences, there can be no responsibility. And without responsibility there can be no freedom. His aim is to pursue an infinite responsibility not bound by essence, but rather realized by the ethical demands imposed from the Other.

In a final third reference to pardon in Autrement qu’être, in a footnote, Levinas speaks again of the inescapability of such responsibility. He writes,

Je ne peux me détacher du soi, c’est-à-dire suspendre la responsabilité qui m’incombe à moi et pas à un autre… alors que je suis à même de pardonner aux autres dans leur altérité en tant que subsumés sous le concept du Moi. (AE 164.37-41)

I cannot detach myself from the self, that is suspend the responsibility that is incumbent on me and no one else… whereas I can pardon others in their alterity inasmuch as they are subsumed under the concept of the ego. (OB 198.16-19)

One’s inability to suspend responsibility is thus a fundamental condition of selfhood for Levinas. One is, as he notes repeatedly across the corpus, ‘always-already’ responsible for the Other. And while one maintains the potential to release another from the existential guilt incurred through one’s status as being, in this passage Levinas notes that release from responsibility is beyond the bounds of the possible. Much as we had seen in the 1967 “Langage et Proximité,” pardon

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95 DL 185.36 / DF 139.12.
96 EDE 234.19-21 / CPP 124.12-14
persists as a possibility – whether as an existential apparatus or as an interpersonal phenomenon – only and precisely because of the inescapability of responsibility.

C. Late Period (1974 post-AE to 1995)

Stating later in the year following the publication of Autrement qu’être in 1974, Levinas’s references to pardon become, as they were in the early period, far more sporadic. While the concern in this late period remains largely upon questions about the functioning of interpersonal forgiveness, they likewise push beyond the rather rules-based approach found in the middle period to questions about what enables or follows from those rules. In these later texts Levinas inquires after such topics as the effect of death upon the possibility of forgiveness and whether the debt of guilt transcends death itself; the theoretical or practical limits of forgiveness; and the inextricable link between memory and the possibility of justice, whereby as a result memory becomes a necessitating condition for pardon. These final scattered references find a rather beautiful return and completion in the last Levinasian reference to pardon in the corpus as well. In this last reference Levinas returns to the existential-apparatus sense of the term first expressed in the 1934 Esprit article, though Levinas now argues that pardon may function in this manner precisely because of the interpersonal dimensions of the phenomenon. As we shall see, forgiveness begins, and ends, as it were, with the Other.

In his Talmudic reading of Tractate Makkot 23a-24b, published in Nouvelles Lectures Talmudiques as “La Volonté du Ciel et le pourvoir des hommes”97 (1974), Levinas provides in a single sentence a moment of true clarity concerning his understanding of pardon. After noting

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97 Translated somewhat strangely by Richard Cohen as “The Will of God and the Power of Humanity.” To translate “Ciel,” French for sky or heaven, as “God” has the unfortunate consequence of removing Levinas’s poetic mastery and allusion to Jewish traditions, even though, as Cohen notes in a footnote on NTR 47, the allusion is clearly to Jewish conceptions of God.
Maimonides’s insistence on repentance as a crucial moment in the process of pardon (a conviction Levinas clearly shares), Levinas writes,

le pardon – le retour à l’humain – n’est possible qu’après le sanction. (NLT 20.17)
pardon – the return to the human – is only possible after sanction. (NTR 58.10)

Pardon, forgiveness, is only possible when two conditions are therefore met. First, there must be an expression of repentance, and second, there must be sanction. Remorse and justice are therefore central and unavoidable aspects of forgiveness. What is perhaps most interesting here, however, is the brief moment of philosophical anthropology contained in the phrase “le retour à l’humain” / “the return to the human.” Levinas thus suggests that through remorse and justice pardon initiates a return to the full humanity of the agent who has committed wrong. Humanity itself – which has been torn through wrongdoing – finds true identity once again not after abdication of memory, not after a purification of the past event, but instead only in the forgiveness imbued with remorse and justice that reestablishes one’s status as a human, as an agent, as a potential Other once more. This is a notion which lies at the very heart of Levinas’s conception of forgiveness, and one which we will see likewise lies at the very core of many Rwandan conceptions of forgiveness. To forgive another is, in its most profound and yet most simple sense, to return someone to her humanity in a remarkable act of recognition.99

Such recognition, however, cannot simply erase the horrors of the acts addressed in acts of pardon. Indeed, for Levinas, not even death holds this power, as becomes clear in the 1975

98 The passage is reminiscent of the earlier discussion of délier and renouer found within Totalité et Infini, wherein forgiveness ‘loosens’ and ‘reties’ the bonds which make humanity and human society possible.

99 This manner of thinking is one which clearly continues for Levinas. In his 1988 Talmudic lecture entitled “Au-delà de l’état dans l’état” (“Beyond the State in the State”), Levinas likewise notes that the alienation which ensues between humans as a result of sin and hate is in need of redemption and pardon. Again the tie is established between forgiveness and the restoration of community, it is that which in recognition after repentance and justice can restore peace among persons. (NLT 52.21 / NTR 85.22)
Levinas discusses the absolute nature of responsibility, a phenomenon that he again describes as occurring “prior to my freedom” \((DQVI\ 117.20 / GCM\ 71.14)\). Therein he notes that not even death could provide an escape from such responsibility. He writes,

*Le tombeau n’est pas un refuge – il n’est pas un pardon. La dette demeure.* \((DQVI\ 118.35)\)

The tomb is not a refuge; it is not a pardon. The debt remains. \((GCM\ 200.30-32)\)

The disavowed implication herein would seem to be that pardon might provide a kind of escape from responsibility, a kind of release. Levinas is instead clear to note that the debt remains even beyond death.

Though the evils committed can never come under erasure themselves, not even by death, pardon nonetheless does have the ability to restore relationship, precisely because of the centrality of repentance as a first moment in the process of pardon. This can be seen in the conclusion of Levinas’ third great work, \(^{101}\) *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée* (1982), where he includes a series of “Questions and Answers” derived from a conversation with a number of Dutch philosophers on the occasion of the 400\(^{th}\) anniversary of the University of Leiden, March 20, 1975 \((DQVI\ 128)\). \(^{102}\) Therein, Levinas is asked to respond to a prepared question wherein Prof. Dr. H. Herring pursues connections between Levinas’s Jewish understanding of pardon and a more traditionally Christian vision of one. Dr. Herring notes Levinas’s rejection of pardon as being accorded by God \((DQVI\ 148.23)\), and continues to ask if it is possible to imagine a pardon that could invite obedience to the Torah rather than the denial of it \((DQVI\ 148.27)\). In his response Levinas notes the importance in rabbinical thought that the notion of grace might only

100 Originally published in *Nouveau Commerce*, No. 31, 1975
101 Levinas considered *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée* to be his third great work after *Totalité et Infini* and *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*.
102 First Published in *Nouveau Commerce*, Spring 1977.
be obtained by a person following a first gesture of repentance from that person. Levinas continues:

…le premier geste appelant le pardon est en ma liberté et dû par moi et c’est lorsque ce premier geste est accompli que le Ciel vient en aide. (DMI 149.12-14)

…the first gesture calling forth pardon is in my freedom and owed by me, and it is once this first gesture is accomplished that the heavens can come to my assistance. (GCM 94.6-8)

The “first gesture” to which Levinas refers is that of repentance, and he thus notes that this is an act which (as in some his earliest works) becomes possible from my freedom itself. And similar to other texts in his middle period (notable within Quatre Lectures Talmudiques), repentance is owed as a prerequisite for pardon, one that must (and can only be) given freely by the agent who has committed moral wrongdoing.

The sense of freedom herein as fully expressed through repentance and responsibility is one which recurs as well in the 1976 text Dieu, la mort et les temps. The transcription of a series of lectures delivered between 7 November 1975 and 21 May 1976, these lectures comprise the last of Levinas’s teaching duties in Paris at the Sorbonne. The single reference to pardon therein occurs in the lecture given on Friday, February 20, 1976, entitled “La Subjectivité comme an-archie” (“Subjectivity as An-Archy”).

Dans la pré-histoire du Moi, le moi est, de fond en comble, otage – plus anciennement qu’ego. Pour le soi, il ne s’agit pas, dans son être, d’être. C’est là la re-ligiosité du moi, pré-originellement noué à autrui. Et c’est seulement cette incondition d’otage qui fait qu’il peut y avoir pardon, pitié ou compassion. On rappellera pour finir Paul Celan: «Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin.» (DMT 202.19-25)103

In the prehistory of the I [Moi], the “me” [moi] is, from top to bottom, a hostage – in a way more ancient than is the ego. For the self, in its being, it is not a question of being. There lies the re[-]ligiousity104 of the me, pre[-]originally105 tied to another. And it is only this hostage’s

103 Note this is a correction of an error from the Levinas Concordance which reports 205.26.
104 This word is hyphenated in both the French and English editions, but due to an unfortunate typesetting issue, it is not apparent in the English edition whether the hyphenation is due to Levinas’s own emphasis (which is indeed the case), or due to the word’s placement at the right of the column. It appears in the original French text intentionally divided, as re-ligiosité.
105 The English translation removes the hyphenation in the French pré-originellement, which is meant to parallel the hyphenation in re-ligiosité.
uncondition that makes pardon, pity, or compassion possible. Let us recall Paul Celan by way of closing: *Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin.* (GDT 175.26-32)

In this passage, Levinas claims that it is the ontologically unconditioned nature of the self (i.e. unconditioned by being, or its status beyond being) as hostage which renders pardon possible. Levinas herein suggests that it is only in those instances wherein the subject is hostage to the Other, to the extent that the self stands in the place of the Other, that true pardon becomes possible. Thus the final sentence is no rhetorical flourish, but, as is so often the case in Levinas’s works, itself does real conceptual work. The reference to Celan, that “I am you, when I am I,” suggests the extremes intended by Levinas’s notion of the hostage. The responsibility of the self to the Other extends to the point where the self falls as hostage to the Other, without recourse, without excuse, and without limit. The implication herein is that the extremes of the hostage state fall into the substitution of the self in the place of the Other. Thus the self *is* itself most completely only when it is ‘in place of,’ when it ‘stands in for,’ when it ‘is substituted for’ the Other - in Celan’s words, only when *Ich bin du.*

One might ask, however, to what extent we are justified in reading the concept of substitution into this text? In fact, the implied reference at the conclusion of the text is quite clear. In the beginning of the lecture there are three explicit references to substitution as the extreme and most complete form of the hostage state (DMT 198.5-6, 8, 11/GDT 172.23, 25; 173.4). This final reference to Celan is thus likely a clear and conscious homage to the crucial chapter of *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* entitled *La substitution* which also begins with the same words. It is likewise telling that the only references contained within *AE* to *pardon* occur within this same section, which demonstrates that the tie among the hostage state, substitution, and pardon herein referenced is established at least as early as 1974 (if not in
This is especially apparent given the direct parallel between *OB* 117.37 / *AE* 150.15 cited earlier (C’est de par la condition d’otage qu’il peut y avoir dans le monde pitié, compassion, pardon et proximité. / “It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be the world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity”) and *DMT* 202.22-24 / *GDT* 175.26-32 (“c’est seulement cette incondition d’otage qui fair eu’il peut y avoir pardon, pitié ou compassion” / “it is only this hostage’s uncondition that makes pardon, pity, or compassion possible”). Though in the latter formulation proximity has been removed, *DMT* 202.23 preserves the wording of the “incondition d’otage” / “hostage’s uncondition” from the correlative passage at *AE* 150.19-20. And yet, given that the conceptual tie is indeed carefully intended, what does it mean then to claim that pardon is possible only because of substitution? If we are to understand pardon as fundamentally an act of recognition, as it is the dialogical face-to-face component which remains central in so much of the work we have herein discussed, substitution makes pardon possible because, first, substitution as standing in place of the other’s needs is an effort at penance and restitution (taking upon oneself the needs of another in an act of contrition) and, second, to take upon oneself the needs of another is itself the full and literal embodiment of the ethical recognition of the other as an other worthy of respect and protection. As is the case in the central quote from Celan, in this act of recognition, the self is most fully itself when it is able to acknowledge and act upon the needs of the other. And it is only in such a context that pardon can follow.

Any such substitutional interaction, however, requires at its core an honest and genuine assessment of individual need, a point we can see in what might be termed a stylistic use of the

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106 *AE* was published two years before *DMT*, though the origins of this passage appear as early as 1967 in a public lecture at the Faculté Universitaire St Louis à Bruxelles, indicating that the concept is well-established by the point *DMT* is published.
term pardon in his 1978 work *Alterité et Transcendence*. In speaking of science, Levinas notes that science is “unforgiving” of dishonesty (*AeT* 103.13 / *AaT* 91.16). While interestingly this is a term used in passing, it is of note that Levinas nonetheless again creates a link between truth-telling and forgiveness. Without honesty in scientific investigation, Levinas claims the search for knowledge and progress (herein framed as science) is bound to failure.

It is perhaps this need for honesty and truthfulness in human interaction that likewise brings Levinas to question once again the limits of pardon, a question to which he returns in a series of interviews with Phillipe Nemo published as *Ethique et Infini* (1982). In an interview Nemo asks Levinas directly of his opinion of Heidegger as well as of Marx, knowing this will elicit a response in reference to this question.

Ph. N. Diriez-vous de Heidegger, toutes chose égales d’ailleurs, ce que Sartre disait du marxisme: que c’est l’horizon indéispensable de notre temps?

E. L. Il y a beaucoup de choses que je ne peux pardonner à Marx non plus… En ce qui concerne Heidegger, on ne peut, en effet, ignorer l’ontologie fondamentale et sa problématique. (*Eel. 40.14-22*)

Ph. N. Would you say of Heidegger, all other things being equal, what Sartre said of Marxism: that it is the indispensable horizon of our time?

E. L. There are many things for which I cannot pardon Marx either… In those which concern Heidegger, one cannot, in effect, ignore the fundamental ontology and its problematic [nature]. (my trans, FIX)

The implication, of course, is that there are certain things for which Heidegger cannot be forgiven, or at least that, in the same vein as the 1987 interviews in *Entre Nous* toward which we will turn in a moment, that forgiveness lies at least beyond Levinas’s personal capacities, if not beyond formal possibility. In large part, Heidegger’s unwillingness to seek repentance is itself a product of his lack of honesty concerning the consequences of his former affiliations. And as we have seen repeatedly, without knowledge of the harms committed, without honest assessment of

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107 Heidegger refuses to recant his affiliation with the Nazi party even on his deathbed and was instrumental in dismissing or blocking the scholarship of numerous Jewish scholars during the years leading up to and including the Second World War and Shoah.
such harms, repentance and thus pardon are rendered impossible. Yet even as much as Levinas is unwilling or unable to forgive a figure such as Heidegger, a reality that only deepens with the impossibility of third-party forgiveness we have already discussed, Levinas is nonetheless willing to engage with and recognize the brilliance (if equally horrifying to Levinas) of Heidegger’s work. In the same interviews, Levinas demonstrates his ability – one which we can see as fundamentally rooted in the indispensable need for recognition among all human beings – to separate Heidegger’s work from Heidegger’s personal and political affiliations. While Levinas ultimately will critique Heidegger’s ontology as representing a fundamental and oppressive totality, Levinas nonetheless remains able to recognize and acknowledge Heidegger’s masterwork *Sein und Zeit* as one of the five greatest books in the history of philosophy (*Eel* 33.12 / *EaI* 37.10).

It is precisely because forgiveness remains impossible without repentance that Levinas will also note that forgiveness can only occur after a crime is committed. This can be seen in Levinas’s 1982 work *L’au delà du verset*, which is a collection of Talmudic Readings, writings on theology, and writings on Zionism(s), ranging in date from 1969-1982. In Levinas’s famous Talmudic Reading entitled “The Pact,” published for the first time in *L’au delà du verset* (1982), Levinas adds an important rejoinder in reference to forgiveness, namely that forgiveness can never be granted in advance (*ADV* 97.07-14 / *BV* 76.13-19). Much in the same manner as he expressed concern with the idea of an infinite forgiveness in his 1954 article “Le Moi et le totalité,” in this passage Levinas is concerned with the notion that forgiveness might be granted without knowledge of the fullness of the events which have transpired. In such a situation, either due to an infinity of forgiveness expressed in scale (in the 1954 piece) or prefigured and thus atemporal (in this 1982 piece), forgiveness that knows no bounds ultimately results in tyranny.
and acts of evil of the highest order. It is exactly this toward which Levinas gestures when he writes of “pardon acquis à l’avance,” “Nous savons où cela peut mener” / “forgiveness granted in advance,” “We know where it can lead” (*ADV* 97.14 / *BV* 76.19). Forgiveness without responsibility, contrition and punishment is, quite simply, totalitarian.\(^{108}\) This is likewise the claim behind his critique of “cities of refuge” from his 1982 Talmudic Lesson of the same name, that blanket amnesty (*AVD* 65.13 / *BV* 46.31) represents an injustice which might be overcome with a focus on Jerusalem (in a new Zionism) as not a city of refuge, but a city of the law, of the Torah, wherein justice is retained because of the adherence to the law (*ADV* 70.02ff / *BV* 51.30ff). Only in such a situation, Levinas argues, is justice possible. This is because acknowledgment of violation of the law entails punishment that can only be given after knowledge of the specific nature of specific events has been gained through memory, which is itself possible only after the crime has occurred. Without any ability to express or understand memory, forgiveness would remove itself from the specific events which it seeks to address, and by so doing rendering itself void of meaning while simultaneously rendering contrition or repentance impossible.\(^{109}\) Forgiveness with impunity (a concept we will revisit as we turn toward the Rwandan context shortly) likewise would reduce the uniqueness of the individual to status as merely an example of the categorical many, totalizing individuality under a humanity which would be separated from responsibility. Forgiveness, for Levinas, occurs only after an event and only with the inescapable consequences of justice, therefore only in a situation wherein memory

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\(^{108}\) This same concern is at the core of Levinas’s concern with “free forgiveness” (*ADV* 128.37 / *BV* 104.23) one without contrition or punishment, that he discusses in “De la lecture juive des écritures,” also first published in *L’au delà du verset* (1982).

\(^{109}\) In his 1985 Talmusic Lesson entitled “Judaïsme et Kénose” published in *À l’heure des nations* (1988), Levinas makes a passing reference to forgiveness in a discussion of a parable framed as a dialogue between God and the moon. Therein, Levinas makes a connection between sacrifice and forgiveness, hence again highlighting even in passing the need for acts of contrition and penance as foundational necessities if forgiveness is to be granted (*HN* 137.41 / *TN* 105.29).
of the events which have transpired has become not merely a possible, but a crucial component of the phenomenon.

This demand for memory and memorialization, and a full honest expression thereof, likewise enables Levinas to demand that we maintain a separation between universalizing principles and the individuality represented in encounter. This return again to the dialogical is at the core of Levinas’s argument in his 1987 Talmudic Lecture entitled “Les Nations et la présence d’Israël” published in À l’heure des nations (1988), wherein Levinas speaks of forgiveness both in reference to Egypt and in reference to Rome. In this text Levinas addresses a moment in the Tractate Pesahim (118b), the Talmudic text he has chosen for the lecture. In his discussion of Egypt, Levinas argues that the Messiah accepts a gift from Egypt in this text through an act of “superhuman pardon” (HN 114.14 / TN 86.25), in which the Messiah recognizes the shelter provided Israel by Egypt in biblical history, even if this shelter clearly led to enslavement in the same texts. The point herein is that Levinas gestures toward the ability to separate formal realities (the providing of shelter) from historical ones (the consequences of enslavement that followed). This bears similarity to Levinas’s discussions of Heidegger in the 1982 Ethique et Infini discussed earlier, wherein Levinas can claim certain actions of Heidegger as remaining beyond pardon while still recognizing the incredible achievement that was Sein und Zeit, even if Heidegger’s conclusions were ones Levinas could never accept (EeI 33.12 / EaI 37.10).

In the same text, Levinas then proceeds to speak of Rome as the representation and embodiment of:

Légalisme universel, fût-il indifférencié en pesant, sans amour, sans pitié, sans pardon (HN 122.30)

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Universal legality, though lacking in nuance and cumbersome, unloving, merciless, unpardoning
(TN 94.18)

What is interesting at this juncture is the claim that a strict legality prevents the possibilities of
love, mercy and pardon. Even though this is also what might be termed a passing reference, it
remains consistent with earlier notions, namely that love, mercy and forgiveness require legal
systems and interpretations that maintain a degree of flexibility. They therefore require legal
systems that are founded not in strict precepts, but rather in the dialogical interactions that lie at
the heart of the ideas of love, mercy, and forgiveness. For as we have seen, to exist truly among
others, to live among the infinite, is not to claim vengeance, even when vengeance is merited.

It is crucial to note, however, that the choice not to claim the right of vengeance is in no
way equivalent to an abdication of memory concerning that for which one does not seek
vengeance. In the 1987 interview between Levinas, Joël Doutreleau, and Pierre Zalio entitled
“Dialogue Sur le penser-à-l’autre”\(^{111}\) published in *Entre Nous* (1991), the interviewers pose a
question on precisely this question to Levinas at the beginning of the interview, a question that
expresses a tie between forgiveness and forgetting (*Enf* 237.06 / *Ene* 201.7). In his response,
Levinas does not address forgiveness but instead speaks of the necessity for a state that gains
legitimacy because of its dedication to human rights, a state wherein justice remains
fundamentally something that transpires between individuals in specific situations and cannot
become codified into formal law. The abdication of memory expressed in the interviewers’
question appears nowhere, with Levinas rather focusing on the fundamental dialogical and
uniquely personal nature of justice that preserves both the reality of punishment and the
“resources of charity” (*Enf* 238.38ff / *Ene* 203.4ff). Importantly, both punishment and charity

are construed as deeply individualized among unique citizens of an universal state, and both, rather than gesturing toward the abdication of memory, are only correctly constructed and expressed when memory of the events under discussion is preserved and understood.

This concern with memory is one which dominates yet another text of the same year. In a 1987 dialogue with Bertrand Révillon entitled “De L’utilité des insomnies” and published within Les imprévus de l’histoire (1988), Révillon questions Levinas concerning the trial of Klaus Barbie. Levinas’s responses follow the questions posed by Révillon:

Comment le philosophie juif que vous êtes regarde-t-il le procès Barbie?
C’est pour moi de l’ordre de l’horrible. Horreur qui ne pourrait être ni réparée ni oubliée. Par aucune sanction, cela est certain. Limite de la responsabilité? Il y a dans cette certitude une bouleversement – je ne dis pas la vanité – de bien de nos méditations eschatologiques, juives et non juives. Mais ce procès, plus horrible que toute sanction, ne devrait pas se dérouler comme il se déroule. Il faudrait aller à cette condamnation sans banaliser, à travers le formalisme et les artifices juridiques inévitables, l’horreur dans ses dimensions apocalyptiques?

Cet homme reste un «autre» pour vous?
Si quelqu’un, en son âme et conscience, peut lui pardonner, qu’il le fasse. Je ne peux pas. (IH 202.16-30)

As a Jewish philosopher, how do you see the Klaus Barbie trial?
For me it is in the register of the dreadful. A horror that can never be repaired or forgotten. Not by any sanction whatsoever, that is certain. Limited responsibility? There is in that certitude an upheaval – I do not say the vanity – of many of our eschatological mediations, both Jewish and non-Jewish. But this trial, more horrible than any sanction, should not proceed as it is proceeding. This condemnation should be reached without letting formalism and unavoidable judicial artifices make a banality of this horror of apocalyptic dimensions.

Does this man remain an “other” for you?
If someone in his soul and conscience can forgive him, let him do so. I cannot. (UH 129.22-33)

As had been the case in both the interviews with Phillipe Nemo published as Ethique et Infini (1982) and the Talmudic Lecture entitled “Les Nations et la presence d’Israël” (1987), Levinas herein again notes the differentiation between forgiveness as a formal possibility and forgiveness

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112 At the conclusion of this text, Levinas uses the term pardon himself when he mentions what he terms the “unforgiven resurrection” (ENf 243.06 / ENe 206.29) of the state of Israel. His claim at this juncture is that Jewish history, the history of remaining faithful to the Torah, is a history that functions akin to a Passion narrative, yet one which resists the redemptive suffering one might expect to see in Christian traditions. For him here, despite all atrocities and attacks, Judaism survives because of its faithfulness to the Torah, a faithfulness that does not find forgiveness in death or suffering. See further: Levinas’s “Useless Suffering.”

113 Originally published in La Croix-L’Événement, 10 June 1987.
as a personal choice. As had been the case for Levinas in reference to Heidegger and Marx, and had been conversely demonstrated in the act of “super human pardon” (HN 114.14 / TN 86.25) bestowed by Messiah in *L’heure des nations*, in the Révillon interview Levinas likewise notes that forgiveness is beyond his personal capacity, though perhaps not beyond that of others. He is likewise clear to note the depths of the atrocities under discussion. Known as The “Butcher of Lyon,” Klaus Barbie, a German Gestapo chief in Lyon was ultimately found guilty of 341 charges brought against him after the war, and was responsible both for personally torturing prisoners and the deportations or deaths of nearly 14,000 persons. In reference to these actions, Levinas is painfully clear. Barbie represents horrors beyond both repair and forgetting, and the trial itself represents the public cataloguing of precisely these atrocities. As will become increasingly interesting as we turn to Rwandan post-genocide trials in a moment, the formal proceedings of the trial represent an important moment for Levinas as they serve to *increase* the fullness of memory and knowledge of horrific events transpired. The concern he herein expresses, one noteworthy in itself, is that the proceedings of this specific trial had failed to preserve the incomparable and unassailable uniqueness of each act of horror, instead rendering them, in Arendt’s famous term, banal. Forgiveness in this late text, even in this brief dialogue, maintains the necessity for knowledge and memory, the individualization of choice in terms of whether or not to grant forgiveness, and the need to treat *every* act of horror individually with respect and acknowledgment in such a manner that banalization becomes impossible. It is only through the preservation of memory, then, that it is possible to truly encounter the Other in her fullness without reducing her to status as a mere object.

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Arriving now at the final reference to pardon in the Levinasian corpus, it is appropriate, then, that Levinas returns in *Autrement que savoir* (1988) to the encounter with the Other in all of its fullness. As is the case in several of the latter texts, this work is a series of interview questions. In the context of a lengthy discussion on rationality and the limits knowledge places upon encounter, Levinas offers one of the more beautiful descriptions of the encounter with the other, with her face. He writes:

> Unicité logiquement indiscernable, énoncée dans un «me voici» répondant au visage de l’autre, pour l’étranger, pour le non-apparenté, pour le pauvre et le solitaire, pour le mendiant, pour la nudité sans défense de pure exposition de visage et la culpabilité sans pardon, la contingence et la mortalité mais pour l’aimé sans concupiscence, le mal aimé peut-être, mais aimé et, dans l’amour, unique, et, dans le «me voici» de la paix, déjà pardonné. (AS 64.29)

> Logically indiscernible uniqueness, announced in a ‘here I am,’ responding to the face of the other, for the stranger, for the non-related, for the poor and the lonely, for the beggar, for the nakedness of the defenseless face completely exposed and the guilt without pardon, the contingency and the death but for the one loved without concupiscence, the one rejected perhaps, but loved and, in that love, unique, and in the ‘here I am’ of peace, already pardoned. (Moser trans.)

In this final passage we see a return to the existential use of the term pardon that dominated Levinas’s earliest works. Herein, as was the case in the 1934 article, forgiveness is that which, through the response to the request for respect written upon the face of the other, frees the self from the tyrannical totalitarianism of being. In this passage, Levinas focuses on the irreducible and noncomprehensible singularity of the other, the one who in full openness and vulnerability requests respect in the hineni, and the one through whose voice a new peace is found, a peace which recognizes that it is in this encounter that pardon was born. Forgiveness, as is the case throughout the corpus, begins, is discovered, and ends with and only with the unique incomparable irreplaceable other.

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115 An additional rhetorical reference (“Forgive me for…”) is included in a footnote discussion of *conatus essendi* at AS 32.37.

116 Levinas argues that knowledge as thematization of content results in a totality which prevents true encounter. In order to meet the fullness of encounter represented in the hineni, Levinas argues that the approach must occur as the title of the work states “autrement que savoir,” otherwise than by knowing.
Horrors Rejected but Never Forgotten

Before we turn out attention to the Rwandan context, a few final words are in order by way of summation of the diverse texts we have examined to this point. While there is clearly something of an unfolding within Levinasian thought of his conception of pardon throughout his career, it is nonetheless true that a coherent and consistent vision of the phenomenon can be gleaned from the texts. Or, to be more precise, two rather different but related understandings of the phenomenon can be derived. First, particularly within the earliest texts, we see a description of pardon as functioning as a kind of existential apparatus, providing the possibility of release from the totalizing injustices of being through the direct encounter with the other. Second, Levinas provides a powerful vision – one deeply rooted in both Jewish tradition and his own philosophical system – of interpersonal forgiveness that seeks to address harm committed between individuals and the restoration of relationship and responsibility between agents. While the second presentation of pardon as an interpersonal event is the one which will be most instructive as we turn toward the Rwandan context, the link between the two remains undeniable.

It is only because pardon as existential apparatus can free individuals from the domination of unbridled freedom of action, thereby freeing them to accept the responsibilities they bear, that the interpersonal dimension of pardon that begins fundamentally as an act of recognition is able to proceed.

The first sense of pardon within the Levinasian corpus is therefore the sense of pardon as a kind of existential apparatus. This sense of pardon entails Levinas’s belief that pardon has the ability to rupture the totality of being because of its fundamental attentiveness to the Other. Preserving the alterity of the other in the interaction, pardon begins and is only possible because
of both the other herself and the responsibility that ensues from the encounter with her face represented in the hineni. As an act occurring in speech, even within the most primordial acts of recognition represented in the hineni and response thereto, pardon reorients the entirety of selfhood and even time itself within the frame of the Other. Time begins, as does true identity, only with and through the Other. As an existential apparatus freeing one from totalization, pardon reframes the world as beginning and persisting within the reference point of the Other alone. It is likewise, then, this extreme attention to the recognition of the Other that allows for the possibility of peace, which for Levinas is fundamentally a state wherein agents engage in the acknowledgment and protection of Others, rather than in their exploitation. Forgiveness thus manages to preserve and even celebrate the full alterity of the Other, for it is through each Other individually and only, that a world beyond the conatus essendi of being is rendered possible. While a shift occurs within Levinas’s writings from the early period wherein pardon is a phenomenon which naturally follows from the encounter with the Other, thereby providing a release from the entrapment and guilt of totalizing being, to the latter period wherein this release from such guilt is a possible but not necessary consequence of the encounter between persons, the point nonetheless remains that pardon functions as an act of recognition between agents represented in the ethical demands of the hineni that release one from the totalization of being to the freedom of responsibility.

Secondly, and directly following from this philosophical conclusion, Levinas presents pardon as an interpersonal event. As we have seen repeatedly, for Levinas, forgiveness is most fundamentally an interpersonal event that is an act of recognition. In this second sense of the term, pardon is possible only when the offender has requested forgiveness and has expressed contrition and remorse for the actions committed. Once these conditions are in place, the
offender then must attempt to provide appeasement or restitution to the offended, both of which in turn require that one be in possession of the full knowledge of the events which have been committed and the harm which has transpired. Pardon in Levinas further requires the presence of an intimate community that can itself allow for the fullness of knowledge needed for true contrition to be expressed and for real restoration or appeasement to transpire. This has the consequences of establishing an indelible connection between pardon and memory. There can be no pardon without memory of the events which have transpired; memory in the fullest and deepest sense of the term persists without alteration and without any degree of abdication.

Levinas is clear as well to note that there can be no third party forgiveness; pardon can only properly transpire between those persons directly involved, never by means of a proxy. This bears the important consequence of requiring that pardon remain ever a direct and dialogical interaction between agents, and as such, pardon remains ever unobtainable from individuals who have died. In other words, one can never receive forgiveness from an agent who has died. In those cases where pardon is indeed possible, Levinas is careful to note that the right to pardon another remains firmly and solely that of the victim. And he is clear to note that although when granted, freedom is given as a gift by the victim to the offender, the victim herself always and completely reserves the right to grant forgiveness, or to refrain from so doing. Forgiveness, that is, can never be compelled.

Perhaps the most fundamental requirement subsiding beneath the interpersonal sense of pardon, however, is the unassailable need for justice. Not a mere benefit or ideal to be sought, justice functions within Levinas’s notion of pardon as perhaps the single most important necessitating condition. Justice becomes possible as the formal process through which punishment and efforts toward restitution might be offered, and as such is the basis of all efforts
to restore the relationship between individuals. Without justice, quite simply, there can be no forgiveness. Levinas is likewise clear to note that while the right of vengeance does indeed exist as a potential component within justice, to truly be a people living within the midst of the infinite (Levinas’s description of what it means to be a “chosen” people) is to be a people that does not seek fulfillment of this right. In other words, forgiveness in Levinas requires that one temper punishment with a degree of compassion that flows from a realization and recognition of all Others as Others.

As always individualized in scope and attention, justice represents another dialogical moment of encounter, not the simple representation of ultimate principles. It is for this reason, then, that in his discussion of justice in *Quatre Lectures Talmudiques*, Levinas returns to the remarkable image of Rizpah, the woman who through her patient loving actions ensures that those around her and indeed all those who would live in her wake (a wake in which we too live) remain utterly unable to forget the horrors which have transpired. Through her remarkable act of recognition, even for the dead, she ensures that one is never able to elide the historical realities that have transpired. It is her voice that calls into the darkness for justice, with her own life serving as an example of exactly what must not be allowed to happen again. While the right to vengeance carried out upon her children was one that was Levinas still argued was justified, to be a people capable of ethics, to be a people living in the midst of the infinite, is not to claim this right. It is to realize, as Levinas writes of Rizpah, that what remains in the wake of “l’implacable justice des hommes et de Dieu” / “the implacable justice of men and of God,” (*QLT* 63.19 / *9TR* 29.6) in the wake of unswerving judicial principles, is a fundamental act of recognition and an unabashed demand for memory. The one attentive to the individual par excellence, it is Rizpah
who becomes the exemplar for a higher justice that rejects the strict punishment of murder, that
knows that while horrors cannot be forgotten, neither can they be allowed to continue.
The Rwandan Gacaca Trials

“Il n’est pas possible de dire à un rescapé d’oublier.” – Leader d’opinion

Having now outlined at some length an exposition of Levinas’s thought on forgiveness, let us now turn toward an altogether different context, that of post-genocide Rwanda. A country still recovering today from the genocide which transpired there in 1994, one which took nearly a million lives, Rwanda is a crucial and timely environment within which to examine forgiveness within its most extreme representations. Most importantly, however, Rwanda today is a country marked by remarkable success in its processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, processes which we will see bear striking resemblance to the theories developed by Levinas in the wake of the Second World War.

A large portion of the Rwanda reconciliation and forgiveness projects find their genesis in the reforms which swept over the Rwandan justice system in the years following the genocide of 1994. Following the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, the country was left in shambles without

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117 S. Gabisirege and S. Babalola, Perceptions à propos de la loi gacaca au Rwanda: resultants d’une etude multiméthode, publication special No. 19, (Baltimore: l’Université de Johns Hopkins Centre pour les Programmes de Communication, Avril 2001), 8. Trans: “It is not possible to tell a survivor to forget.” –Opinion Leader.
functional government, legal or social systems. In many ways, the country faced what appeared to be an impossible task: how to reconstruct a country socially and bureaucratically in the wake of more than 800,000 deaths and as many if not more killers, as well as millions more suffering from deep and abiding trauma. What remained of the legal system was immediately overwhelmed. Prior to 1994, there had been capacity for between 13,000 and 15,000 persons in the Rwandan penal system. In the six years following the genocide, on the basis of denunciations, more than 100,000 persons were incarcerated. It was in this context that the Rwandan government instituted the Gacaca courts, a form of trial based upon traditional community gatherings in order to resolve disputes. While the system has evolved and changed during its implementation, the central concern with the Gacaca courts has remained the attempt to bring to light the truth of what occurred during the genocide through the establishment of face to face encounters.

Called Gacaca courts in a reference to the monarchical system of locally based justice which took place in gatherings on the grass within community compounds (the gacaca), the Gacaca courts were established largely through four laws enacted between 2000 and 2006 (Organic Law No. 40/2000, Organic Law No. 33/2001, Organic Law No. 16/2004, and

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Organic Law No. 28/2006\(^{122}\) in an effort to alleviate the vast overcrowding present in the prisons. By 2000 it was determined that it would take between one and two hundred years to try the remaining persons being held in prison. As a result, in an effort to deal with a fully overwhelmed justice system, it was determined that certain categories of cases would be referred to local courts composed of community members wherein honest and respected members of a community would serve as judges in the place of the national courts.

The Gacaca courts were established such that confession by the accused would result in a fifty percent reduction in the term of the sentence, wherein fifty percent of the reduced amount would be served in prison and the remaining fifty percent served in service to the community. Thus, for example, what would have been a twenty-four year sentence could receive a fifty percent reduction with confession, wherein six years would be served in prison, and the remaining six years in community-service. The emphasis throughout was upon the need to ensure that the truth was brought to light, and hence the system was enacted to ensure that truth held greater priority than punitive action.

Gacaca courts were given jurisdiction, however, over only the lower three of the four classes of crimes relating to the genocide. Under Article 51 of Organic Law No. 40/2000, the crimes of the genocide were codified into four categories. Category 1 included the atrocities committed by the planners of the genocide, persons who held governmental, police, or jurisdictional authority and used this authority to commit genocide, persons who killed with...
“zeal” or “excessive wickedness,” and those persons who committed rape or sexual torture. It is noteworthy that rape was herein placed in a higher category than ‘ordinary murder,’ recognizing the trauma of sexual assault in a manner somewhat unique in modern western law. Under the Gacaca law, all perpetrators in Category 1 were referred automatically to the national court system. Category 2 included acts of deliberate homicide or attacks causing death as well as acts causing injury with the intention of death though not resulting in death. Category 3 was defined by those attacks causing injury without intent to cause death. Category 4 was reserved for criminal offenses against property (though it retained the possibility that these conflicts could be resolved outside of the court system privately).

Under Article 51 of Organic Law No. 40/2000 the Gacaca courts were given the power to regulate and try crimes which fell under categories 2-4, and Article 56 explicitly stated that Category 1 crimes were not eligible for any reduction in term of sentence. Article 51 of Organic Law No. 16/2004 of 19 June 2004, however, revised this system, condensing the four categories into three classes and adding additional crimes to Category 1. The two additions to Category 1 were acts of torture not resulting in death, and dehumanizing acts upon the dead body. Additionally, Categories 2 and 3 of Organic Law No. 40/2000 were condensed into a single Category 2 in Organic Law No. 16/2004, which left intact Category 4 as the new Category 3.

Organic Law No. 40/2000 which entered into effect on 26 January 2001 established that the Gacaca courts would be organized according to jurisdiction and category of crime. The jurisdiction of the Cell was assigned crimes of category 4 (Article 39), the Sector the crimes of Category 3 (Article 40), the District the crimes of Category 2 (Article 41), and finally, the jurisdiction of the Province was assigned the task of settling disputes (Article 42). For reasons of practicality, this system was later simplified under Organic Law No. 28/2006 in accordance with
the reorganization of Categories of crimes mentioned above. The Appendix to Organic Law No. 28/2006 of 27 June 2006 also lists the Gacaca courts that had already been established by cell, sector, and district.

Across jurisdictions, Organic Law No. 40/2000 established that a 2/3 quorum was necessary for trial (Article 22), and that deliberation would remain secret (Article 24). In the process of deliberation, while the goal was explicitly stated as a consensus decision, it was conceded that when necessary an absolute majority would suffice to render judgment (Article 27). Critically, Article 32 also stated that no person maintained the right to keep silent, but rather that in all of the community Gacaca trials every person was required to report all that they had seen or heard, with the strong consequence that failure so to do would result in a maximum 1-3 year imprisonment (again with the allowance that half of the term could be served in prison and the other half through community service). This provision remains consistent with the overarching claim that as the genocide affected every member of the society, so too must every member of the society be involved in the process of reconciliation. This is expressed most explicitly in the preamble to Organic Law No. 33/2001 which states that, “testifying on what happened is the obligation of every Rwandan patriotic citizen and that nobody is allowed to refrain from such an obligation whatever reasons it may be.”

In each instance, the local Gacaca courts were to be composed of local members of the community who were regarded as honest and upright. Under Article 10 of Organic Law No 40/2000, potential members were required first and foremost to be ‘honest’ and were required to meet the following conditions: “a) to have a good behaviour and morals; b) to always say the truth; c) to be trustworthy; d) to be characterised by a spirit of sharing speech; e) not to have been sentenced by a trial emanating from the tried case to a penalty of at least 6 months’
imprisonment; f) not to have participated in perpetrating offences constituting the crime of genocide or crimes against humanity; g) to be free from the spirit of sectarianism and discrimination.” Any person who was 21 years of age or older was permitted to serve, with the special clause in Article 10 that there would be no “discrimination notably of sex, origin, religion, opinion or social position.” While these 7 attributes were reworded in Article 14 of Organic Law No. 16/2004 of 19 June 2004, the overarching emphasis remained upon the need for honesty in character as the central characteristic. This is in keeping with the underlying theme of the Gacaca courts which places value not upon retributive justice but upon attempts at reconciliation and forgiveness through bringing to light the truth of what transpired during the genocide.

In addition to noting qualifications for those who could be elected to the Gacaca courts, Organic Law No. 40/2000 outlined certain persons who were prohibited from serving outright, and prohibited from serving in specific instances. Article 11 describes persons prohibited outright as those who were involved in Government administration (in keeping with the emphasis upon local justice and reconciliation), exercising political activity, active duty soldiers, police, or local defense forces, professional magistrates, and leaders in political parties, religious organizations, or non-governmental organizations. These categories were amended and clarified by Organic Law No. 33/2001, where in Article 7 the law notably removes active members of local defense forces, leaders in religious organizations, and leaders of non-governmental organizations from the list of prohibited categories. In specific cases, Article 16 of Organic Law No. 40/2000 also made provision for a system of recusal when

the defendant with whom himself or his wife is relative or related by direct marriage or up to the 2nd degree, the defendant with whom it was already existing a serious enmity; the defendant with whom he/she had deep friendship relations; [or] the defendant for whom he/she was guardian.
While this was further clarified under article 10 of Organic Law No. 16/2004, the notion of recusal in cases with close personal ties (positive or negative) was upheld.

Organic Law No. 40/2000 also made a special exception for perpetrators of genocidal acts who were minors at the time, an exception which was upheld in later laws as well. Article 74 established that children under fourteen at the time of the killings could not be tried but could be sent to rehabilitation centers, whereas children aged fourteen to eighteen at the time of the killings could receive fifty percent reductions of sentences if convicted (on top of the fifty percent reduction given for confession in the Gacaca system, and the 50/50 split between prison time and community-service time). Finally, Article 64 established very specific procedures to be followed in the Gacaca trials, procedures to ensure honest dialogue could transpire face to face in the presence of the community, between both perpetrators and survivors of the genocide.

In addition to the legal documents, several good documentaries have been filmed to record the Gacaca process. In the Tall Grass\textsuperscript{123} tells the story of Joanita Mukarusanga and Anastase Butera (the man who killed her husband and children), in the context of Butera’s Gacaca trial. Both Gacaca, Living Together Again In Rwanda?\textsuperscript{124} and In Rwanda We Say... The Family That Does Not Speak Dies\textsuperscript{125} examine the 2003 release of prisoners in order that they be tried in local Gacaca courts. What is perhaps most notable in these films is the consistent emphasis of survivors upon the need for the truth to be told, which itself was one of the driving impetuses behind the establishment of Gacaca courts. As Joanita Mukarusanga states of Butera’s lies, ”It's like a knife turning in my wound. If Butera told the truth, things would be better. I don't


\textsuperscript{124} Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda, directed by Anna Aghion, (2002; Kigali, Rwanda: Dominant 7 Gacaca Productions, 2002.), Documentary video.

\textsuperscript{125} In Rwanda We Say...The Family That Does Not Speak Dies, directed by Anna Aghion, (2002; Kigali, Rwanda: Dominant 7 Gacaca Productions, 2002.), Documentary video.
care if it was the Devil that possessed him, he should tell the truth. But he keeps lying.” Yet what is perhaps more striking is her ability to claim – in a manner consistent throughout each of these films – that “when Butera admits to everything and apologizes I will forgive him.” The implication throughout is that forgiveness and reconciliation are indeed possible when the truth is admitted by all parties involved and forgiveness is sought by the perpetrator.

Several opinion polls are also available which examine the public impressions and receptions of the Gacaca system, published through official agencies of the Rwandan government. Additionally, Avocats Sans Frontiers has published the results of its observation of Gacaca trials throughout the country during 2005. And while the latter may perhaps fall more under the critical project (as a part of the ASF’s virulent attack on Gacaca, criticizing the courts for failing to provide professionally trained legal counsel for the accused), they nonetheless provide external documentation of the process.

The *Perceptions à propos de la loi gacaca* (2001) report noted that 96% of those surveyed had planned to particulate in the election of the Gacaca judges. The same report likewise noted that 87% of those surveyed indicated that they were ready to give a deposition, indicating the widespread vision of how important it was to preserve the memories of what had transpired as a crucial component of the processes of justice. Additionally, 86% of those surveyed indicated that some kind of compensation for the families of those harmed was necessary. And nearly 70% of persons noted that accepting compensation signified a desire for reconciliation. Importantly, then, compensation was understood in public opinion as early as

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126 ASF has repeatedly and very critically denounced certain parts of the Gacaca process and trials. This critique is in line with many western evaluations of Rwanda that criticize any aspects of Rwandan politics or justice that do not mirror Western European or American systems.


2001 as a component of the process that leads to reconciliation, not the reconciliation itself.\textsuperscript{129} Nearly the same amount likewise noted that compensation alone would not be enough to lead to peace in the country. And nearly 90\% stated that peace was only possible in the country if first, the organizers of the genocide recognized their crimes; second, the génocidaires sought pardon from those injured; and third, the génocidaires demonstrated their desire for reconciliation.\textsuperscript{130}

A 2003 National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) Report noted that one of the most common comments from the surveys conducted was the necessity of an “openness to the future.”\textsuperscript{131} And to this end, 90\% of persons believed that the community work provision that was a central part of the punishment system initiated by gacaca would lead to peace and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{132} Additionally, nearly 80\% demonstrated a willingness to forgive those who had committed even utterly horrifying actions provided that the perpetrators first confessed, engaged in restorative work, and asked for forgiveness directly.\textsuperscript{133} The report goes on to ask if such reconciliation and forgiveness would lead to compassion and security. More than 80\% of persons polled responded affirmatively.\textsuperscript{134}

An undated training presentation likely from early 2006 from the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG), states the goals of the Gacaca process quite clearly. It is instructive that the first two goals that the presentation lists as being accomplished through Gacaca are first, that the courts serve to “disclose the truth about everything that happened during the genocide” by establishing individual responsibility while removing suspicion and
distrust, and second, that it represents “a justice from and within the population.”¹³⁵ A distinctively Rwandan institution, reimagined from monarchial practices to meet the needs of a modern nation in shambles, gacaca was a process that was fundamentally participatory. The truths of memory and memorialization, along with the needs of justice (both of which are often cited as prerequisites for forgiveness within the country) are both goals that are only possible when agents are willing to engage each other as agents, becoming involved in what is at its core a fundamentally dialogical process. A 2003 African Rights report reaches the following remarkable conclusion:

The Rwandese people have, through gacaca, gained an opportunity to be involved in the administration of justice to an unparalleled extent.¹³⁶

The process, of course, was far from perfect. The 2003 African Rights report, cited above, also notes as well many of the early difficulties with the training process for those who would be involved in the process.¹³⁷ Avocats Sans Frontiers, in more than a dozen different reports, expressed concern with the lack of professional legal representation for the accused in the local districts. There were additional problems with the reality that the inyangamugato (those personals of universal community integrity and respect that were elected in local communities to serve as judges) were not universally as honest or as upright as had been hoped.¹³⁸ There was further early concern with the ability of survivors to participate fully and openly in the training sessions, or even in the trials themselves, given the reality that they represented – particularly

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¹³⁷ Gacaca Justice, 5.

¹³⁸ Gacaca Justice, 18.
after the genocide – an extreme minority in the country. Additional surveys revealed that a majority of persons expected some false testimony, particularly in the communities least affected by the genocide, where actions were more easily hidden.

And at the same time, participants in the process were optimistic concerning the potential of the system; even those persons who were initially quite hesitant to participate often emerged from the training session motivated to contribute to the success of the process. The African Rights report of 2003 relays the opinion of one such person who noted that during the training sessions “they exchanged experiences, facilitating their mutual understanding of the subject.” A 2003 report from the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission states this hope even more strongly, noting that better than 90% of persons surveyed saw value in the Gacaca process. Manzi, a judge from the Rugenge cellule, states:

"Our work as judges will contribute to the reestablishment of peace and reconciliation because it will provide a foundation for justice. the truth about what happened will be known; the trials speeded up; the innocent will be acquitted and the guilty will be punished."

The 2003 African Rights report similarly concludes:

"Gathering so many at the roots of Rwandese society together to uncover atrocities and heal communities represents the polar opposite to the grassroots call to unite and commit genocide. As such, gacaca should be seen as one of the most profound and significant pieces of legislation to have been introduced in recent Rwandese history."

Gacaca explicitly did not aim at creating feelings of revenge, but rather toward showing the extreme depths of genocidal crimes through both the punishment of the perpetrator and the opportunity given to that person to amend behavior and begin the process of reintegration into

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139 Gacaca Justice, 29.
140 Opinion Survey on Participation in Gacaca, 13
141 Gacaca Justice, 29.
142 Gacaca Justice, 30.
143 Opinion Survey on Participation in Gacaca, 14.
144 Gacaca Justice, 30.
145 Gacaca Justice, 51.
society.\textsuperscript{146} As opposed to “classical justice” conducted in strict unwavering rules, the explicit aim of the Gacaca jurisdictions was to “combine both punishing and reconciling duties.”\textsuperscript{147} A clear differentiation was maintained, however, between remediation for practical harm and for moral harm. It was, unambiguously, the former which was at the center of concern for the Gacaca courts. Through the courts, reparation was made possible for damaged property and lost economic benefits, and community work was meant to provide the beginning of rebuilding and restoring the communities which had been decimated. And yet, the Gacaca courts were clearly not an effort to provide reparation for the moral crimes committed. A 2004 report states this rather clearly, “as regards moral damages, consultations are still on.”\textsuperscript{148} The ability to differentiate between the two types of harm is impressive, noting that remediation is not intended to remove the blame for the brutal murder of innocents (as if such a thing were ever possible), but rather to provide amends in those types of situation where remediation was possible.

The concept of recognition was likewise at the core of the process itself; during trials persons were not allowed to interrupt, but were to be given to opportunity to speak freely without insult, assault, or threat, whereby all testimony was aimed toward uncovering the truth of actions that have transpired.\textsuperscript{149} Even the earliest training manuals were explicit that persons needed to be able to speak and be heard without fear. A 2001 report makes it clear that part of the role of the president of the Gacaca proceedings in each cellule was not merely to allow, but to encourage timid persons to speak. The report even noted that in such settings women often needed additional encouragement and support to speak out, a recognition of the patriarchal history of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147} Mukantaganzwa, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Mukantaganzwa 14.
\item \textsuperscript{149} \textit{Trial Procedures in Gacaca Courts}, (Kigali, Rwanda: National Service of Gacaca Courts, January 2005), 4.
\end{itemize}
country which, admittedly, has changed dramatically if not fully in the years following the genocide. The report notes that participation of all persons was extremely important, and that justice and confidence in the trials was only possible when all persons were recognized and given the right to be heard.  

Gacaca, as a process dedicated to truth-telling and justice that could allow for reconciliation and even forgiveness, was at its very center, a process of dialogical interaction. And as a dialogical process, several points are of note. First, the courts maintain a focus upon uncovering the truth. This is evident in the sentence reduction process established as recompense for confessions. In this process we can see that the Gacaca courts – while fulfilling a critical juridical function – served a somewhat different goal, that of initiating the process of reconciliation through the reconstruction of social bonds on the basis on the construction of accurate collective memories. Second, the whole community was required to be involved in this process. The rationale was that as the crimes which transpired during the genocide affected everyone within the country, so too each person of the community needed to be involved in the process of reconciliation. This was the reason for the division between professional courts and the Gacaca courts as comprised of ordinary citizens. And third, Gacaca courts placed emphasis upon face to face encounters. With trials often occurring in or quite close to the location of the actual crime, the courts brought together each of the persons involved in the atrocity in a face to face encounter seeking the truth in a setting where the rights of each individual to be heard and recognized remain foundational to the entire process. With these crucial attributes in mind, we will now turn to examine some of the points of contact between the Gacaca processes in Rwanda and Levinas’s theory of pardon that emerged from his experiences as a survivor of the Shoah.

The Gacaca trials which have recently been completed across Rwanda represent an important development in the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation which occur across the country. Though often criticized by Western (largely American) media because these trials do not conform to Western ideas of justice, particularly in that they do not guarantee representation for the accused, these trials have created an important space in the society wherein reconciliation and forgiveness can flourish. From within the space created by allowing criminal sentences to be served in kind within communities, a number of projects have evolved which are designed to accomplish the rebuilding of individual and social bonds through facilitating reconciliation and forgiveness between persons. What is most striking, however, is the degree to which these processes of reconciliation resonate with those conceptualized by Levinas in the wake of the genocides of the Second World War. To that end, I will now explore six key characteristics common to both Gacaca practice and Levinasian theory.

First, both demand the collective formation of memory. For Levinas, this derives from the requirement that forgiveness between human beings remain an eminently human phenomena. Never that which may be accomplished by proxy, to forgive is to approach another human as human, bare, open, or in Levinas’s terms, “naked.” It is also for this same reason that he is so careful to note, as we have seen, that pardon can never occur in advance. To pardon, in Levinas, is to engage in discourse and dialogue wherein the nature of crimes committed are discussed, acknowledged, accepted. No forgiveness can proceed without this dialogical interaction. And in the process, what occurs is a remarkable collective creation of memory between agents. As in the discussions which occur in the Gacaca courts, all relevant agents must become involved in the retelling of the story and in the recognition and acceptance of guilt. This is one of the real benefits which derives from the fact that individuals cannot refrain from testifying. All agents are a part of the narrative which has been written in many cases on their very bodies, and thus the only real narrative of the past upon which a new future can be built must be built with the participation of all persons. There is no story of society that can be sufficient without the contribution of all of its members, just as there can be no forgiveness without the reconstruction of historical narrative which transpires in dialogical interaction.

Second, emphasis is placed upon repentance as an enabling condition in both contexts. There can be no forgiveness, as Levinas notes in his famous Talmudic lecture, without an agent first expressing remorse and then repentance. One must approach another, admit the truth of one’s actions, and express contrition and remorse if one is to begin to be seen as more than the simple author of a single horrific act. It is this process which is codified and formalized in the Gacaca trials, with the added benefit of this process taking place in full view of all members of the community.
Third, and directly following from the requirement for repentance and contrition, is the requirement that justice be accomplished. Acts of restitution are therefore absolutely central in both Levinas and Rwandan contexts. Without justice, there can be no responsibility, and impunity reigns. And yet, what is sought is not the strict justice of absolute principles, but rather the individualized justice that attends with compassion to an individual. In the Levinasian corpus, we saw this represented in the remarkable figure of Rizpah, the woman who refused to look away or hide the horrors which transpired, instead displaying the horrors that befell “les victims de l’implacable justice des homes et de Dieu” / “the victims of the implacable justice of men and of God” (QLT 63.19 / 9TR 29.6). In Rwanda this need for compassionate justice is found in the two-fold sentence-reduction process. But perhaps even beyond this legal procedure, even the pink uniforms worn by prisoners in the countryside as they complete communal work projects as juridical punishment likewise serve as a reminder of the horrors which have transpired. In both this image of Rizpah and in the realities of the Rwandan legal code we find both a demand that one witness the horrors transpired, while at the same time requiring one to object to a legalistic justice that overlooks the humanity of individuals, and that finds the hope for a future peace housed in the restitution of community made possible through an individualized compassionate vision of justice.

This brings us to our fourth point, concerning who and what exactly is forgiven. As Levinas notes in the Talmudic reading, and likewise discusses in Difficult Freedom, one of the limiting conditions of forgiveness concerns the ability to approach the one harmed. In the context of genocide, this becomes impossible in terms of directly addressing the victim, now dead. And yet, in its sentencing structures, Gacaca courts have held a nuanced view of who precisely is harmed and in what manner that harm transpired. For there are always multiple victims in
instances of murder. In reference to the one killed, it may well be that forgiveness for such acts is beyond possibility. And Rwandans by and large are very cognizant of this. A friend of mine lost his wife, seven children, and his house during the genocide. His family was murdered brutally and their bodies dumped unceremoniously into the nearby river, never again to be seen, never to be buried. It may well be that there is no restitution for such acts. They will never be better. They will never be purified. They will never be restored. And yet, to fully understand the nature of such a crime, one must extend the purview beyond the direct actions toward those now dead to encompass damage done toward those still living. An additional crime was committed toward the one who survives, alone, his family taken, his house burned. It is those actions, those crimes that are the focus of the community work projects done. The rebuilding of houses, or assistance in processing crops is not an effort to remove the horrors of the murders committed. It is rather, and remarkably, an attempt to make recompense for the suffering and hardship faced by surviving victims.

Fifth, in both instances, the possibility of pardon co-originate with the emergence of responsibility. Ironically, though an accused criminal is found standing before a local criminal tribunal which has the power to levy lengthy sentences and substantive fines, it is not this body of authority which returns responsibility to the offender. Rather it is the community of individuals, gathered together in the grass, in the Gacaca, who – through their very presence – re-establish the true ethics of responsibility. Moving from délier to renouer, bonds once loosened are retied again, and a society torn asunder begins the lengthy process of putting itself back together, perhaps as Susan Brison has written, “for the first time.”

Face to face, individuals once again call out to one another for recognition, for protection. And it is exactly within this

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Brison, Aftermath, 16.
same moment of recognition that pardon again becomes possible, precisely because in the same
moment a new “juris-diction” is established, as once again the law is spoken by the face.

Sixth, and finally, both Gacaca and Levinasian conceptions of pardon have the
remarkable ability to reorder time. Rather than being limited to the past-oriented vision that can
result from a fetishization of memory, within pardon the past returns to presence and
memorialization becomes integrated fully into an eternal present formed in encounter. Pardon
therefore exists in an ongoing present which bears the past within it and simultaneously reorients
itself toward the future. It does so, however, only from within a context where the Other is
constitutive of time itself as the Other becomes the nexus of past, present, and future. A new
world, a new life begins with the ethical primacy of the Other herself, and pardon attains these
remarkable permutations of time because it lives within encounter. This is perhaps the greatest
strength that might be found in both Levinasian and Rwandan conceptions of forgiveness, for it
is this reordering of time that allows individuals and even a society to once again be able to
imagine a future.

This reorientation of time in pardon is also, perhaps, one of the most honest realities that
can be expressed in these contexts. Genocide does alter time. As Susan Brison has noted, such
trauma introduces a surd, a nonsensical entity, into the series of life such that the series is forever
altered.\textsuperscript{153} Just as worlds and societies are turned upside-down within genocide, so too is time
itself. Through mass violence and genocide, fixed and immobile points are created within time
that serve as a newfound \textit{axis mundi}. Without reconciliation, without forgiveness this axis is
fixed. And yet in those remarkable instances where forgiveness does occur, where through the
reordering of time a new history is able to be written in dialogue and discourse between all

\begin{footnote}
153 Brison, \textit{Aftermath}, 47.
\end{footnote}
agents, agents are able to take ownership of this very axis. No longer agents merely passively subject to events beyond their control, literally beyond their control as they recede into the past, in those moments where pardon reorients time, individuals have the opportunity to take control of their own history and destiny by becoming active agents in their own creation. In reconciliation and pardon certain individuals can become more than the authors of individual acts, just as others can once again become more than the mere victims of the same acts. Through the reorientation of time, new worlds are opened for victims and perpetrators alike. And in so doing, the *axis mundi* of their lives becomes *theirs* to direct, to define, to question, to understand, and to grieve.

It is precisely this ability to reorder the experiences of time that is at the heart of an editorial that appeared in *The New Times*, Rwanda’s primary newspaper on 9 April 2011 as Rwandans began to commemorate the seventeenth anniversary of the genocide, and it is with this editorial that we will bring this section to a close. In a remarkable testimony, the appropriately named Job Jabiro writes of his own experiences of genocide and its effects upon time:

> Today is 17 AG (After Genocide). You see for me, there is a before, and an after Genocide. In 1994, the World as I knew it ended as my country descended into the abyss. | It is a remembrance, a commemoration, an obligation, a celebration of humanity and an affirmation of the sanctity of human life. | Remembrance poses an undeniable moral dilemma. Is it not, perhaps better to remember in absolute silence, contemplating the unfathomable cruelty and evil of the human heart? Reflecting on the need to individually and collectively purge the “wolf” in us? | Or should we, as Job did, cry out loud that the blood of the innocent should sear the memory of the living? | One thing I know. Remembering the victims of a genocide is not merely a Rwandan obligation. It an imperative for humanity.

And so, 17 AG. Yesterday was a nightmare, today is a dream come true. After death, the resurrection. Not as zombies, but as a truly reborn humanity. Rising from the ashes of yesteryear sphinx like. | Writing a new, miraculous story on the tabula rasa that was 1994. I have seen the face of evil and it has no saving graces. I have also seen the face of humanity, with all its imperfections. I much prefer the latter. ¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Jabiro, “Remembering.”.
Part II
As we move into Part II of this work, we will now reverse the direction of our inquiry. While we began in Part I with the philosophy of Levinas and then sought to bring that material into dialogue with Rwandan institutions, thought, and practices, in Part II we will begin instead with Rwandan thought and practice, and then inquire after the ways in which this material might be brought into dialogue with both Levinas and certain other continental philosophers. As was the case in Part I, Part II is likewise divided into three sections. And as in Part I, the effort herein will be to attempt to place two disparate lines of thought – one European and one African – into conversation to examine how they may mutually inform or clarify each other.

In Chapter 4, “Twese Hamwe: The Art of Forgiveness,” we will engage with the work of a number of Rwandan artists. Exploring the concept of pardon as it is represented in several different collections contained in the Rwandan National Museum of Art, we will allow artwork to speak as testimony, guided by the interpretive framework offered by the museum’s guide, the framework which therefore dominates the experiences of visitors to the Museum. Through the analysis of painting, multimedia works, and sculpture, we will unearth a remarkable sense of interdependent fractured identity, an uncompromising demand for memorialization, and bold claims of the possibilities of new futures. In so doing I will place these conclusions in dialogue with the philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and Jacques Derrida.

Chapter 5, “Bathed in Blood and Light: Memory and Memorialization,” will begin with an examination of three memorial churches within Rwanda, one where the genocidal history has largely been elided in favor of a forward-looking contemporary congregation, another where the church was turned into a formal memorial and tomb, and a third which has developed a remarkable hybrid identity as memorial and active congregation. In this chapter the centrality of memory as an inescapable component of forgiveness will emerge, and we will inquire after what
it might mean to forgive and remember. In the process the philosophical discussion partner will be Emmanuel Levinas, while I will additionally engage with R. Clifton Spargo’s astute notion of “vigilant memory.”

The final chapter in Part II, Chapter 6, “Compelled to Forgive: Competing Discourses Among Rwandan Christians,” will examine the question of whether forgiveness can be compelled without destroying a particularly important and central characteristic of the phenomenon, that of its givenness. The chapter will investigate the stark differences between both governmental and religious authoritative statements which attempt to compel persons to forgive, and individual testimonies which in contradistinction speak of forgiveness as a gift which may be given only by the victim. In discussion with Emmanuel Levinas, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jacques Derrida, I will suggest that Jean-Luc Marion’s notion of givenness provides a helpful means of understanding the nature of the gift represented in the phenomenon of forgiveness, one that can serve to explain how pardon – in concert with the testimonies of individuals in Rwanda – only truly arises when fully beyond all forms of compulsion.

The reader will note as well that as Part II draws extensively upon experiences I had while living and conducting research in Rwanda, the second half of this work at times displays a more intimate and personal tone. I have, in Part II, allowed intimate and human experiential moments to occupy places of prominence. There are certain things which should impact us profoundly, and where appropriate, I have allowed the reader a glimpse into the ways certain experiences have deeply affected me. It is my hope that this approach will allow deeper entry on behalf of the reader into a context that at times can be foreign and beyond facile comprehension.

As we proceed, then, let us turn to the remarkable nation situated in the hills of the rift valley.
The rains come in April. After several months of drought where the dry, red earth turns to dust leaving its mark upon everything and everyone in sight, dark clouds roll in over the hills. And as the rains start, life pauses. People gather inside, under trees, huddled under a shared umbrella, waiting for the clouds to pass so that life can begin again. Every April water today mixes with the dirt to run red over the same ground that in so much of the country was covered with streams of another sort just over twenty years ago, when it was another shade of red that wet the dry parched earth. But what is washed away is never forgotten, even if, as is truly the case today in many situations, forgiveness has been granted.

In April of 1994, in less than a hundred days, somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people were brutally killed in Rwanda. Neighbors turned against each other, families were divided, communities decimated. Years of lingering colonial influence had reified what were once economic divisions into racialized ethnicities, biologicalized in a manner eerily similar to

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National Socialist practices in Europe. Identity had become understood as something in the blood, and to be Tutsi was spoken of publicly by the early 1990s as a disease, an impurity someone was born with. Inyenzi, cockroaches, a terrible word meant to dehumanize and denigrate the minority population, meant to claim them unworthy even of bare existence. Identity in Rwanda in 1994 was an attribute not chosen but imposed, thrust upon you by birth, thrust with the force of death. The killings stopped only when the Rwandan Patriotic Front captured Kigali, though they had slowed somewhat before this, as there were – quite simply – few remaining to kill. The most efficient, complete, and public genocide of the twentieth century was over in just over one hundred days, a period during which the rest of the world – including every single permanent member of the United Nations Security Council – refused any intervention, engaging instead in a perverse voyeurism rooted in unswerving and unabashed self-interest. Within Rwanda during those months of 1994, the only word which even approaches description is a postmodern English tetragrammaton of the aporia itself, Hell.

Those months of 1994 were traumatic for another survivor of another genocide as well. As bodies were still washing up on the shores of Lake Victoria, on October 14th of 1994 – the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Friedrich Nietzsche’s death – the brilliant and talented writer and scholar Sarah Kofman took her own life. An incredible artist, so much of Kofman’s work focused on trying to help others to see more clearly, to see privilege, to see what lies hidden in the blind spots too often overlooked, to see those voices too often silenced. An artist of words, Kofman left behind works of literature and philosophy that function as an important form of testimony, as the testimony of an artist who sought to teach others to read, to really read with great attention the hardest realities evoked in text and in life. It is no surprise then that in his eulogistic work on Sarah Kofman, entitled simply with a double ellipse (“……”), Jacques
Derrida has eloquently written about testimony, forgiveness, and recognition. Of Kofman’s words, Derrida writes “such testimonies survive us, incalculable in their number and meaning.” And it is precisely this kind of testimony of the artist, “incalculable... in meaning,” the testimony of the survivre, the testimony that lives-on, that over-lives, that continues with a constant surplus of meaning that is the focus of this chapter.

In light of Kofman’s death, the death of a long-time and dear friend, Derrida writes, “I thus had to try to relearn everything, and I am still at it.” Derrida’s claim here is one which can be said of the most profound experiences, those that manage in and of themselves to reorder the entirety of life, to force one to “relearn everything.” Loss: suicide, murder, trauma, violence. Each reorder life in such a way that one must indeed “relearn” everything one thought one knew. As Susan J. Brison has written, these experiences introduce a “’surd’ – a nonsensical entity – into the series of events in one’s life.” They introduce “an event that fits no discernible pattern,” that requires one to create a narrative that reinterprets the entirety of the past, and the entirety of the future, in a way that is forever altered. The surd, the violent act, knows no erasure, it presents with and woven into a memory that cannot be forgotten.

Identity in the wake of this kind of violence, then, exists not as recovery, but as creation. The always-originary generative creative act of words and deeds revealed in testimony is comprised of a narrative discourse presented in fractured moments. I was no longer clear who I was when I got back from a year living and conducting research in Rwanda. I am no longer sure such clarity is possible. I “had to relearn everything, and I am still at it.” And the events whose

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159 Brison, *Aftermath*, 104.
aftermath I witnessed had not even happened to me. But they had happened to friends, to the families of people who now had names written on my heart with identities woven into my person: Hippolite, Nadia, Isaac, Moses. To turn to testimony – to the creative art of testimony – is then to turn toward an imagined future brazenly created from, re-created from, for the first time, an impossible past. “To relearn everything:” herein lies the only possible future in Rwanda. It is a central claim of this work that the signifying creative generative power of testimony – a power we most often encounter in text – can exist well-beyond the simple forms of letters, words, and sentences, that it can just as well – if not even better – present itself in pigment, canvas, nylon rope, collage, wood, acrylic, metal, and leather. I contend that artwork is also a form of testimony that speaks and calls out for recognition. Thus it is to this work that I will now turn, to a series of exhibits housed at the National Museum of Arts in Rwanda, exhibits publicly housed with the clear intention that they will sur-vive, to live-on in a public life to continue to provide the surplus of meaning that can open windows into the complexities of (re)creating Rwandan communal life in the wake of atrocity. For there to be reconciliation, for forgiveness to occur, a new triptych is needed, one found in abundance within these exhibits, and in truth, one found today all across this remarkable tiny county in the mountains of the rift valley. It is a conceptual triptych that focuses first upon the necessity of acts of recognition, second, upon acknowledging the reality of interdependent identity, and third, upon forward-looking acts that re-orient one toward a new future.
The Creation of the Musée des Arts

Museé des Arts, Rwesero, Nyanza

The Musée des Arts in Rwanda is located on the hill of Rwesero in Nyanza, about two hours south of the current capital of Kigali. The building is one with a complicated history. Originally constructed in the late 1950s, it was intended to serve as the new “modern” home of King Mutara III Rudahigwa, thus relocating the seat of monarchial power in Nyanza during the colonial period just a few kilometers from the traditional Rwandan structures that until that point served as the home for the King and his family. An effort to westernize and modernize the monarchy in response to Belgian colonial norms and ideals, the structure is complete with large galleries, marble floors, high archways, western-style bathrooms, balconies, and verandas designed on an European scale fit for the king to entertain guests of state. While under the care
of a Belgian physician, however, King Rudahigwa died under suspicious circumstances right at the height of the revolutionary movement for Rwanda’s freedom from Belgium colonial authorities, on the 25th of July in 1959, and as a result never occupied the home.\textsuperscript{161} In the successive years the building served as the Supreme Court, the Court of Cassation,\textsuperscript{162} the Appeals Court, the Court of Auditors,\textsuperscript{163} and offices of the Prosecutor General.\textsuperscript{164}

Following the dissolution of the Habyarimana regime, the end of the genocide, and the ensuing consolidation of government offices to Kigali, a new life for this enormous home was first envisioned in 2003, to convert the structure into a national museum. The museum is an homage to the centrality of cultural and artistic activities in the Rwandan monarchial court, now with the museum reimagined as a home for the cultural and artistic heritage of the entire nation.\textsuperscript{165} The building today houses an impressive collection of Rwandan art in a number of different media, including painting, sculpture, collage, wood-carving, and textiles. The collection derives from three primary sources: first, the acquisitions from the School of Art of Nyundo in the 1990s; second, a collection from April of 2006 entitled “Tolerance;” and third, a collection from October of 2006 entitled “Art for Peace.”\textsuperscript{166} The two 2006 collections are usually referred to collectively as a single exhibit on “Peace and Tolerance” and represent the largest portion of the current collection. It is primarily from this collection that the examples I will discuss derive.

\textsuperscript{161} Lode Van Pee, ed., \textit{Ingoro y’Ubugeni n’Ubuhanzi i Rwesero, Nyanza}, Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen, Ghent, Belgium: Greffier du Province de la Flandre Orientale, 2006, 17. The images reproduced in this chapter are from this work with the exception of the images of the piece by Cyizanye Tony.

\textsuperscript{162} The highest form of an appellate court. Does not review facts of the case, but instead only reviews legal reasoning.

\textsuperscript{163} Responsible for reviewing finances of the State.

\textsuperscript{164} Museum Brochure, 2011.

\textsuperscript{165} Museum Brochure, 2011.

\textsuperscript{166} Museum Brochure, 2011.
1. Recognition

Turning then to the first portion of this conceptual triptych, the museum holds a number of pieces whose central message is that of recognition, a concept that exists both, as Jean-Louis Chrétien has framed it,\(^\text{167}\) as a call and as a response. For Chrétien, there is an intimate and inextricable link between these two dialogical movements. He writes, “our voice, in order to be a voice, must always already be open, at its innermost core, to the speech of others.”\(^\text{168}\) And it is precisely this innermost core which lies barren and open, awaiting response in the remarkable piece to which we will now turn. Created by Jean Claude Sekijege in 2006, *Behold* is a multimedia piece made of wire screening, leather, plaster, wood, adhesives, and acrylics.

\textit{Behold, Jean Claude Sekijege}


\(^{168}\) Chrétien, \textit{The Call}, 45.
Measuring one hundred and twenty by eighty-five centimeters, it depicts a victim of the genocide who has survived. Understood and presented as a figure calling for recognition and justice, the figure is deeply damaged. Though the core of the person’s head and heart still shimmer under the value of golden paint, both are literally melting, eroding. What has held this figure together now weeps as full vulnerability is revealed, with the interior open, raw, exposed. Both hands are absent, and the arms are pitted and scarred. One arm has been replaced with a prosthesis of wood, and a large scar runs across the figure’s abdomen where the person has been cut. A bullet wound pierces the right side of the chest. Faceless, the work still calls out, “Behold.” Behold what has happened to me, see into the core of myself, a self barely woven together, and now as fractured and chaotic as the disorganized, random background that is thrown about back and forth beyond all sense. As described by the curator (whose interpretative gloss is an integral part of the experience of the pieces as one visits the museum), the victim is surprised to still be alive, to have outlived herself, to survive, to live on. And yet, it is this same victim who still ponders the possibility of reconciliation, even from a place of complete vulnerability. Fractured, broken, having outlived herself, and yet still alive.

While “Behold” functions primarily to reveal the vulnerability of the surviving victim, the radical place from which any survivor of the genocide must ponder forgiveness (whether or not this is ever granted), two other paintings in the exhibit focus on the moment of forgiveness itself. Both are entitled “Le Pardon,” and are from 2006. The first, by Akimana Fabien measures thirty by twenty-nine centimeters.

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170 Interview with curator of Musée des Arts.
It depicts a man on bended knee, his head exposed and hat lying on the ground to his side. The left hand is upturned and lies open, while the right hand is clasping the hand of a figure standing before him. On bended knee, humbled and kneeling in the dirt, the figure asks forgiveness of another man and the woman who is with him, seated and with both arms outstretched, hands open. The standing figure opens a hand gesturing for the man to rise, a symbol that his words have been accepted, and that he will be recognized. The faces of both men are obscured, and the eyes of each are partially or wholly closed or hidden. The gendered component here is central as well. The violence of the genocide, while carried out on the bodies of men and women alike, was
largely committed by men. It is only the face of the woman present behind the men who sees fully. She is the one whose eyes are open, looking upon both men engaged in an act of forgiveness. It is she who has seen, and has survived, all that has transpired. Violence in Rwanda against women during the genocide is treated with particular severity, with rapists being classed in the same category as organizers and planners of the genocide, Class I, a class which necessitates the use of the federal – and not local – courts for the pursuit of justice.\textsuperscript{172} At once proto- and anti-feminist, this move was made because of a conception of women as the bearers of the possibility of future humanity. One might then interpret this moment, wherein it is the woman’s eyes who are open, as a witness to this act of recognition, of forgiveness, by the very possibility of future humanity itself. The extension of her arms and open hands, then, bears particular significance, displaying her openness to the future.

And yet, the piece is far more than simply future-oriented. For the frame, notably, is created from crushed purple glass beads and is integrated – adhered – to the painting itself. The only purple present in the painting, the frame is created of the same purple that until recently\textsuperscript{173} was used across the country to denote memorial. The shade is distinctive, and passing through any small town in Rwanda, one will find a banner bearing the imperative “\textit{twibuke},” that is “remember.” This is important in that the act of forgiveness that is transpiring within the painting, one witnessed fully and recognized by the representative of future humanity herself, occurs not with an abdication of memory, but precisely in the presence of memorialization. In this case it is only when literally framed by memory, that the act of recognition central to forgiveness can occur.

\textsuperscript{172} Organic Law No. 40/2000, Article 51 and Organic Law No. 16/2004.
\textsuperscript{173} Starting with the 19\textsuperscript{th} Commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi of 1994, Rwanda now uses the color grey to denote memorialization, deriving from historical practices using grey ash to mourn the dead.
The other piece entitled “Le Pardon” is by Floride Mukabageni, and measures fifty-five by thirty-six centimeters.¹⁷⁴

A painting largely in somber earth tones, it likewise depicts figures asking for forgiveness. Two persons are humbled before a third figure with outstretched arms and open hands. And notably, one of the two figures asking forgiveness is clearly female, suggesting that both men and women during the genocide committed acts that would prompt one to ask for forgiveness. While any

details of faces are fully absent from this painting, the embracing touch between the standing figure and those humbled is no less an act of recognition. The standing figure cradles the head of one figure and gently holds the arm of the second. Again it shows the inextricable tie between forgiveness and recognition, but what is of particular interest here is that it shows both this recognition and the second element toward which I have gestured, the interdependence of identity.

Looking closely at the work, the bodies do not line up correctly. The right leg of the standing figure becomes part of the skirt of the kneeling woman. A foot appears on the left of the painting that could be either that of the female figure or the standing one, or, perhaps, the communal foot of both. Likewise, the legs of the figure kneeling on the right do not quite line up, and the background is a curved checkerboard of sorts, where body parts change with the background. Identity, created ever again in passing moments, in a theme we will see in several other works as well, is thus always compound, interdependent.

This same overlapping of color and lines is seen in the abstract painting “La Cohabitation,” by Anastase Uwimanintije, which measures one hundred and eighteen by ninety-three centimeters and also was created in 2006.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Van Pee, Ingoro, 35.
La Cohabitation, Anastase Uwimanintije

The notion of cohabitation, living together, is hereby represented in a series of Venn-diagram style overlapping ovals, wherein the colors change within each quadrant. As a result each circle is made up of a variety of colors, and shapes, and no two are precisely alike. Reds, greens, yellows, oranges, and purples overlap and dance, with each piece necessary in order for any oval piece to be complete. The very embodiment of an interdependent web of existence, the piece focuses on the necessity of diversity for wholeness. As the curator of the exhibit notes, it is only
with this radical difference, where different ideas and opinions can all come together, that the beauty of the full piece – or of a full society – becomes possible.

2. Interdependent Identity

The weaving or interdependence of identity is indeed a central theme of many of the works currently held in Musée des Arts in Rwanda. But perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the piece entitled “Twese Hamwe” by Aco Tshumbula. Dating from 2005 and measuring sixty-five by forty-five centimeters, the work is composed of fiber, plastic, and metal constructed on wood.¹⁷⁶

The title is of particular significance in this depiction of four figures standing together. One of only a few pieces titled in Ikinyarwanda, the local language, the title is a modification of one of the central institutions of the genocide. In 1994, the mobile killing units were called Interahamwe, which translates roughly as “those who work together.” This was meant to evoke the communal work projects first instituted by the Belgian colonial authorities under the corvée system. Such projects continued well past the colonial period and continue even today, where one Saturday morning a month all Rwandan citizens are required to gather in their local hills and complete projects designed to help the development of the country. During the genocide, it was the killing of Tutsis that was constructed as communal work, a work that the citizenry was said to have a duty to complete. The title of this work, then, is a modification of this unforgettable term, now changed to translate as “all of us, together.”

In this work, however, it is the citizenry who stand together, united. The bodies of the figures are woven from nylon cord and while each of the bodies are woven in the same manner, the cording is such that the bodies are composed of different colors, not standing apart, but united. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the manner of this weaving itself. Not merely do the figures stand united side by side, but their very bodies are literally woven into and through the body of the persons standing next to them. To separate the unity, one would be required to cut the figures apart, but by doing so, each person separated would be harmed. The work is intended to be a direct statement about the interdependence of identity. One does not exist, one’s own very body cannot exist, without those with whom one forms community. This is reflected at the base of the work as well, where there are insufficient numbers of legs for the persons present. One does not stand, one cannot move forward, without the assistance of others, Others to whom one is inextricably bound, and who one carries within one’s own self.
This theme, which we have seen within several pieces in the Musée des Arts carries beyond these exhibits as well, and has taken hold in a number of different places throughout the country. The day before I left Rwanda after living there for a year in 2010-2011, we held a large party to bid farewell to dear friends. To put things simply, it was not an early evening, and my flight was a morning flight. Having said goodbye to all of my friends, and after a very short sleep, I was finishing packing when the phone rang. It was a Rwandan friend, a very talented artist, who I had seen just hours before asking if he could come by to say goodbye. Groggy and somewhat confused I consented. A short time later, my friend Cyizanye Tony arrived bearing a rolled canvas to present me as a farewell gift. Though he knew loosely of my work, we had not spoken in detail about my interests in hybrid identity as it relates to reconciliation and forgiveness. As I unrolled the canvas at once tears came to my eyes and a chill of excitement pulsed through me.

Measuring eighty by sixty centimeters, the canvas is an abstract depiction of a family. Depicting two parents and four children, the work utilizes paint and collage on canvas.
Of particular note again are the interweaving of body parts. The arms of the child in the foreground become the arms of the one at center. The figure at right appears to possess arms as well that are simultaneously those of the mother, or perhaps they are legs. The lack of clarity is intentional, meant to show how the family is woven, even as each of the children are depicted in a different color, with variations in pattern. Just like so many families in Rwanda today are hybrid creations, as tens of thousands of orphan children were taken in following the genocide,
so too is it intentionally unclear what kind of family is depicted. And yet, nonetheless, they are woven together. Even the heads of the parents overlap, and in the overlap, the colors change. The family is likewise always under the watchful eye of the community, never separate, never alone, never solitary. But perhaps most interesting is something not immediately apparent. Looking closely at the central figure of a child, one can see that the canvas itself is damaged. Originally I thought this was simply an old canvas that had been repurposed, until the artist explained to me that the canvas had been intentionally cut, and then woven back together. *Cut, and then woven back together.* “I had to try to relearn everything,” writes Derrida following the loss of Sarah Kofman. To learn what it means to sur-vive, to live-on, to outlive. To learn what it means to be a family, or a community, that is always cut and put back together, always incomplete, damaged, and yet re-created in every moment. To relearn that being an individual is to be woven into those around you, held together always in one’s vulnerability in an interdependent web of life.

*Untitled*, Cyizanye Tony, detail
3. A New Future

The third element present in several of the works is found in forward-looking acts that re-orient one toward a new future. And on this theme I will briefly explore three final works. The first, “Concert d’Opinions,” is by Epaphrodite Binamungu and dates from 2006. Measuring one hundred by sixty-five centimeters, the work is composed of ficus, sand, sawdust and acrylic on canvas.177

![Image of Concert d’opinions, Epaphrodite Binamungu]

177 Van Pee, Ingoro, 30.
It depicts a group of people wrapped together sharing conversation. As described by the curator, the artist is seeking to show how all of the voices present are equal, all have a place within Rwandan society. It is important to note that the community is depicted as literally wrapped together, within a blanket made from the trees that cover the countryside. The wrapping mirrors both the mountains in the distance and the hilltop peaks that cover the country, showing how the very land itself embraces all members of Rwanda society. Thus the work notes that in order for development or recovery to occur, each voice has its place within the embrace of the country, and each voice must make its contribution.

And yet as much as this focus is upon imagining the future, it occurs only and always with a strong remembrance of what has happened. The work entitled “Où est-tu?” is one such piece. One of the larger pieces in the exhibit measuring one hundred and thirty-three by ninety-three centimeters, the 2006 piece is by Eugène Gumira and is composed of wood, rubber and metal.

*Où est-tu?, Eugène Gumira*
The frame, composed of damaged burned wood, evocative of the untold numbers of houses burned during the genocide, is held to the central metal panel by bindings made of rubber, a substance meant to evoke and recall the Belgian colonial period. The central metal panel is badly damaged, cut repeatedly with a machete, and covered with bullet holes of varying sizes. Across the left is a designation meant to read like a house number on a gate: “No. 59 73 94.” The barrier between home and private family life shattered and broken, the numbers recall the three largest periods of mass killings in Rwanda: 1959, during independence; 1973, when Juvenal Habyarimana seized power from Grégoire Kayibanda in a military coup; and 1994, when the Genocide Against the Tutsi occurred following years of planning and sparked by Habyarimana’s assassination. The center is held together with a chain meant to represent the bonds of justice, but the lock intentionally is left open. Marking both private and public life, the chain of justice here is meant to suggest that all persons are bound under the same rules; no longer can impunity reign. And yet neither is this a statement about locking away and forgetting the criminal out of sight, beyond view. The lock remains open suggesting that though justice is necessary, it must exist with compassion when one accepts one’s actions and one’s history and chooses to look forward, chooses to ask for forgiveness.

“Où est-tu?” uses in its title not the second person form of être, to be, but the third person singular, thereby rendering tu, you, not as subject but as an object. Not merely a simple “where are you?,” the title reads literally “Where is you?,” implying “where is that which you are?” Or put otherwise, it raises a question of identity in the wake of violence. As the curator of the exhibit explains, the work calls out, asking the perpetrator of violence “if he is ready to change by building what he had destroyed. He is asking… the victim of the genocide who is still alive, to accept the enemy as his friend, as brother.” And perhaps worded most concisely, the curator
continued, “together, they start building the society.” The piece is thus at once a demand for responsibility, a demand for recognition of history and memorialization, and a call to all those who view it: “where is you?,” “who is it that you are?” It asks each person to consider who they are, the nature of their responsibilities, and how to proceed in this light. For any future reconciliation or forgiveness is impossible until answers to these questions can be found.

I will bring my discussion of the works in the Musée des Arts to a close by returning to another piece by Jean Claude Sekijege also dating from 2006 entitled “Cycle of Life.” The same artist who created “Behold,” Sekijege, a native of Kigali, has created in “Cycle of Life” a sculpture of an ostrich shaped from largely found materials. Measuring one hundred twenty-five by one hundred ten by ninety-five centimeters, the work shows the ostrich poised, ready to run.

_Cycle of Life, Jean Claude Sekijege_

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178 Interview with curator of Musée des Arts.
Repurposing materials traditionally damaging to the environment to recreate a natural form, the artist is at once issuing a demand for environmental protection and also opening a conversation about what can be salvaged more generally. What is it that can be made of those pieces discarded, thrown aside, damaged? How might one bring new life to those things which have been reduced to not but waste? Yet what is perhaps of greatest interest here is that the bird itself is bound. Its legs are bound tightly, so while poised to run, it remains stationary, turned – appropriately – to sculpture.

As explained by the curator, this means that the “problem[s] we have in our everyday life, [the] family conflicts, we must cut them and let our bird, our ostrich run, let our everyday life develop because if we continue to live in that conflict we will not develop. Instead we will come back to genocide again.” The bird itself is made of the damaged, broken, discarded material, but it is held back, paralyzed, by the bindings of conflict. It therefore functions as a symbol of community where fractured, vulnerable, broken selves have been woven together to form a new creation, but wherein its movement is restrained. The bird, the community, is held back not by its history, or its brokenness – these are inescapable realities of its very existence – for the contours of both define its very identity. What holds the bird back is its attachment to conflict. It is bound and paralyzed when it chooses to live only in that conflict, rather than carry its brokenness into a new future. And this, of course, is the “Cycle of Life” itself. To be born into a broken world, woven together from pieces that are never perfect but always vulnerable and incomplete, to find new life within communities that are created and recreated from fractured selves, and yet still to be poised, ready to run, to explore and discover what lies just beyond the next horizon. And, as Sekijege calls for in the work, it is to break free of the conflicts that bind,

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179 Interview with curator of Musée des Arts.
to run free, to carry these imperfect selves forward, all the while knowing that you may have to stop to put yourself together again from time to time

**Fractured Selfhood**

A constellation of ideas thus exists across these many paintings. We see depictions of the self as always fractured, and as existing as an entity that is never fully autonomous. Woven into the persons around it, overlapping and changing as it encounters others, this is a self that is always already damaged, always in process of creation, always being put back together, and as Susan J. Brison has noted, often “for the first time.”\(^{180}\) As Chad Lavin notes in *The Politics of Responsibility*, one of the hallmarks of post-liberal identity is the ability to see the self as always already harmed.\(^{181}\) Recovery is not an effort to seek to restore the self to an originary whole, but the willingness to recognize that the pretense to this originary wholeness is itself a damaging illusion. Lavin suggests that one possible remedy to this situation is to shift the discussion away from events and toward conditions. Granted, events create and affect conditions, but recovery must focus not on trying to fix or purify a past event, but on seeking to change a condition that persists. And this has been a central aspect of Rwandan reconciliation efforts from their earliest manifestations. There is no purification of horrific, violent death. Elie Wiesel’s admonition that all theodicy is itself an injustice encapsulates this well. For even to suggest the possibility of such purification, that murder could somehow be rectified, understood, or made alright merely compounds the injustice. In the wake of such complete violence, it is most certainly *not* alright. And it never will be.

So what remains? What remains is a fundamental, basic communicative act that begins as recognition, and perhaps ends as forgiveness. For forgiveness is itself most fundamentally an act of recognition. As Charles Griswold as noted, it is the willingness to see the person as more than the simple author of a specific act.¹eight It is to recognize the offender as a person, not merely as an offender. And it is at same time noting that you – for better or worse – are tied intimately into the very person of another. It is for this reason that the consistent call for forgiveness that occurs in these pieces transpires in the same space that demands memory and memorialization. As we saw in several pieces, forgiveness is framed – sometimes literally – by memory. The question then, is what it means to forgive and remember.

Any real future, any recovery, and most notably, any forgiveness, in the wake of violence occurs only when fractured broken selves carry their history and brokenness forward, when they recognize the bonds that weave their own existence into the very bodies of Others, and then together choose to envision a new future. It is for this reason that I consistently argue that forgiveness is most fundamentally an act of recognition. It is, as Levinas has said of the origin of all acts of recognition, and thus of all acts of ethics, the *hineni*, the *me voici*, the ‘here I am,’ that lives in the call for recognition and the response given, a response for Levinas in which resides even perhaps the divine itself.

A long and difficult process, it may well be as Derrida has suggested that forgiveness is always ‘to come,’ a constant and perhaps endless deferral siting just beyond the horizon, waiting in that place that forces all of the agents involved to look together in the same direction. But that, of course, is what makes the society possible again. Once the people are, again, together, looking

¹eight Griswold, *Forgiveness*, 57., among others.
forward, imagining a future, and yearning for the hope that lies just beyond the most distant hill, just beyond the hilltop of Rwesero where a remarkable building today stands. It matters of course how you get there, but it matters perhaps even more to believe that there is indeed something on that far hilltop, a symbol, perhaps a museum taken from complicated colonial histories and reimagined as a center for artistic conversation and expression. A precious place to hold those hopes, and to remind people that the bindings need to be loosened if the ostrich – in all of its beautiful interdependent intricacies – is to run. A place where, as Derrida did in the wake of Sarah Kofman’s death, as has been necessary for so very many, one can begin “to relearn everything.”
Bathed in Blood and Light: Memory and Memorialization

“If you knew me and you really knew yourself you would not have killed me.”
– Niagengwa Feresiyani

One of the more difficult realities of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi of 1994 is the fact that as much as eleven percent of the nearly a million persons murdered were killed within the confines of Christian, largely Roman Catholic, churches. In 1994 the génocidaires monopolized on the historic trend that churches had been spared in Rwanda during other times of violence, encouraging persons to gather in churches with the disingenuous claim that once again they would find shelter. In several instances, priests themselves called people to enter the church sanctuary for safety, only to turn over the keys to the interahamwe – the mobile killing units – to begin the massacres. Churches across Rwanda served a similar function to the Cambodian killing fields or the gas chambers of eastern Europe as a means by which to centralize the population marked for destruction. The process was terrifyingly efficient and

183 Inscribed in the National Memorial at Gisozi, Kigali.
185 Notably during the 1959-1962 revolution and the killings which followed the 1973 coup by Juvénal Habyarimana, among several other times now referred to commonly by the Rwandan Government as “rehearsals” for genocide.
somewhere in the order of a hundred thousand persons perished within spaces once marked for worship during the hundred days of 1994 over which the genocide transpired.

As the genocide finally came to an end following the capture of Rwanda by the Rwandan Patriotic Front in July of 1994, these churches were left stained with blood and littered with corpses. This reality remained, sometimes for years, as disputes raced across the country concerning the proper future use of these spaces that had housed Roman Catholic congregations.

On one side of the debate were those who argued that the spaces should be cleaned, the bodies buried, and the sanctuary reconsecrated so that mass might continue. To cleanse the church and reconsecrate it was seen as serving to separate the horrific acts, and the persons who committed them, from the church itself as a symbol of religious faith and practice. Reconsecration was seen as necessary as a sign of respect to the church, as a house of the divine, in order to restore its honor. On the other side were those claiming that the human remains must stay within the church, that the actions which had transpired therein were so heinous that the church had been transformed into a tomb and could only continue to function legitimately in this capacity. It was argued that the remains must therefore stay within the tomb, and that to remove them would to the desecration the graves of those killed. With the spaces reserved to function as tombs, visitors would be allowed to enter to be reminded of the true depths of the horror which had transpired, the church itself serving as a kind of *mememto memori*. Chiefly concerned with the prevention of any kind of genocide denial, preservationists argue that the human remains are therefore a striking testament to a history that cannot be elided and a warning to future generations.

In June of 1999, *L’Osservatore Romano*, the newspaper of Vatican City and the Holy See, published an unsigned editorial addressing the issue of the conversion of churches into memorials. In the midst of a wildly inflammatory article that sought to establish claims of a
“double genocide,”186 the unsigned editorial describes a perceived smear campaign against the Roman Catholic Church in Rwanda by the Rwandan Government:

Part of this project is the express wish of the authorities to convert a certain number of Catholic churches into genocide mausoleums. The obvious intent is to link the Church with the genocide in the memory of Rwandans. The Holy See is opposed to this pretense, pointing out that the churches are places of worship and reconciliation for the whole community (Tutsis and Hutus) and cannot be monopolized as charnel-houses by part of the population.187

Even were we to set aside for the moment the disrespect toward those murdered conveyed in speaking of these massacre sites as “charnel-houses” by the Holy See, it is clear in this brief excerpt that the Catholic Church and the Rwandan Government were dramatically at odds over the proper function of these sites. In large part, though not exclusively, this was a debate between Church and Government leadership, and a debate that was deeply invested in questions surrounding the role the Catholic church may have played – and the guilt it would likewise have incurred – during the genocide.

No clear consensus was ever reached across the nation. In 1997 the Rwandan Government took control of the Roman Catholic Church in Nyamata with the express demand that any Masses to be conducted within the church specifically be directed toward the memory of the Tutsi who were murdered there. Since that time the government has likewise taken control of the Catholic churches in Nyarubuye and Ntarama. These three churches exist today only as memorials, and together constitute half of the six official Rwandan Genocide memorials. Other churches across the country, including the Catholic Church of Ste. Famille in Kigali were cleaned, bodies were removed, and the spaces reconsecrated so that celebration of regular

186 The controversial claim that a genocide against the Hutu ensued following that of the Tutsi is itself largely an attempt to describe security measures by the Rwandan Government against escaped killers who fled Rwanda and then continued the Genocide Against the Tutsi across the border targeting Tutsis in the East Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a claim often accompanied with wildly inflated casualty numbers, as “genocide.”

Masses could recommence. Still other churches, fighting the tension between both sides of the argument, have sought to carve a melded hybrid identity between both poles.

As a result, three categories of churches exist today in Rwanda, which might be classified as reconsecrated spaces, tomb-memorials, and those few resisting either end of the spectrum and instead continuing as hybrid living spaces. This chapter examines one example from each of these categories, each a Roman Catholic Church, though many more examples exist among the hundreds of genocide sites in Rwanda. In the first group lies the Church of Ste. Famille in central Kigali. The site of horrific violations in 1994, the church today is an active congregation regularly celebrating mass with little reference to its history. Priests and preachers proclaim in the same space the necessity of reconciliation, and the power of forgiveness, even as they tend to gloss over the church’s history. Rarely denied, the history is also rarely emphasized as focus is shifted to the future; effort is made not to dwell on the past. An example of the second category, in the Roman Catholic Church at Ntarama the blood and brain matter of children still stain the walls of the church. As is the case in a similar tomb-memorial in Nyamata, nearby a new church has replaced the one which now lives only as a memorial. Though serving as a strong testament to the past, tomb-memorials like Ntarama do little to facilitate the integration of their unavoidable history into a new future. A third type of space, the Roman Catholic church at Kibuye exists as an effective and powerful hybrid between these two categories that differs importantly from each of the other two groups of Rwandan churches. Neither eliding its history, nor oriented unidirectionally toward the past, the church in Kibuye today lives again as a center of community life, belief, and practice at the same time that it powerfully embraces and accepts its own history. Through remarkable use of space and the weaving of memory into daily practice, the church in Kibuye has embraced this liminal status between memorialization and active
congregational life, and as such occupies a somewhat unique status among Rwandan churches, engendering powerful possibilities for the ongoing processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This third style of church-memorial as hybrid space, represented in the church in Kibuye, succeeds at avoiding certain important challenges faced by each of the two modes of memorialization. On one pole, the abdication of memory, or an effort to gloss over the events which herein transpired, is, as Emile Townes has noted, “an astute strategy of domination,” wherein “forgottenness ultimately destroys.” To elide the history, or to claim that the past event is over, slipping into a forgotten antiquity is surely an injustice as it denies the full identity of places, persons, and events. Due to the lack of memorialization, the church at Ste. Famille risks succumbing to this danger. And yet on the other pole, the memorial Church as an active congregation must resist reifying the process of memorialization that occurs there. It is insufficient to objectify the memorial into a memory that one might witness and then compartmentalize. This risks fetishizing the memorial, shifting the focus from encounter to consumption, thereby closing discussion rather than opening dialogue. It is this latter danger which is most present today in memorials like Ntarama.

If the aim of memorialization remains to facilitate the difficult process of integration of events into the narrative life – both past and future – of the individual and the community, memorialization in once sacred sites of horror therefore presents unique challenges. Places once intended to house the presence of the divine now must focus upon housing absence. Reconsecration to return the presumed presence of the divine, without likewise acknowledging the need to return to presence those killed within these spaces, is as problematic as re-presencing the dead without opening any dimension of what Levinas refers to as the sacred possibilities

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188 Townes, Womanist Ethics, 26.
189 Townes, Womanist Ethics, 27.
which ensue from this encounter. Spaces exist with full histories, and cannot be reduced to the consumption of only those parts considered desirable, whether for their capacity to provide a center for worship (Ste. Famille) or their capacity to instill a stunned silence in those who visit (Ntarama).

The aim of memorialization, as S. Brent Plate has written, is that “through the participation of observers within the space created by the memorial, past times and spaces are reactivated in the present.” Traversing the past and present, the memorial weaves both together while at the same time providing “a window to future remembrances.” This implies that the aim must always be to draw the visitor or congregant into a certain conversation, for, as Plate continues, “memory is not an activity of the mind only, but of the body and of the minds and bodies of others. Like seeing, remembering is a dynamic, interactive process,” one that occurs between agents. Yet how is such an interactive process possible when a whole category of the agents are dead?

Death neither severs the capacity to encounter the Other as agent nor mitigates the responsibility which therein ensues. As I have argued elsewhere, encounters with dead agents

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191 Plate, “Zakhor,” 199.
192 Plate, “Zakhor,” 196.
193 Emmanuel Levinas’s writings on death are extensive concerning the implications death entails for alterity and responsibility. I argue that Levinas establishes that in death a “remainder” of the Other persists that is not conquered by the ontological event of death. Emerging from an inversion of Heideggerian discussions of possibility and impossibility in reference to death, Levinas argues in Totalité et Infini (1961) that a “remainder” of the Other continues even after death. As a result of the primacy of ethics over ontology, the appearance of this “remainder” implies that responsibility toward the Other is independent of ontological status as alive or dead. Any encounter with the alterity of an agent, dead or alive, therefore produces responsibility for that agent. I argue that responsibility in the context of memorialization not merely applies to preservation of the memory of those lost, but entails responsibility to the dead directly as agents, even though the ontological realities of death alter the ways in which this responsibility is enacted. One remains responsible to the dead, even as one must act on behalf of the dead, an ethical action which transpires always within the context of responsibilities held simultaneously toward additional, living, Others. This serves to include even dead agents, and not merely their memory, within the dialogues concerning the creation of future realities.
are indeed possible, and such encounters entail direct responsibility to the dead, even if death alters the means by which this responsibility is enacted. Ethical responsibility which ensues from encounters with dead agents is, by its nature, a phenomenon which pushes memorialization beyond the simple reactivation of the past within the present, aiming additionally toward the future that might emerge from that reactivation. All efforts to act upon responsibility are by definition future-oriented. Re-presencing the dead as ethical agents is therefore an event which prompts both remembrance and active discussion concerning how to fulfill the impossible responsibilities one holds as witness to horrors carried out upon persons now dead. Moving memorialization beyond reactivations of memory which are past-oriented into discussions of the life and implications of memory within future worlds remains perhaps the most crucial capacity which may be cultivated within these spaces.

Effective memorialization emerges, then, precisely when the memorial is able to function in the classical sense of an icon. Always functioning by gesturing toward a beyond, initiating a certain kind of encounter and conversation, icons have encounter at their very center, whereas classical idols remains static objects for consumption, possession, or compartmentalization. To remember within these churches implies far more than the simple recollection of memories. It demands that one engage with individuals, the community, and the dead in a complex dialogue. As icons, memorials must speak to the visitor, calling out from the depths of trauma and horror to demand recognition through re-presencing acts. And for an icon to function as an opening toward a new future, this re-presencing must move beyond a singular occurrence, but rather

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194 See also Oren Baruch Stier, “Holocaust Icons, Holocaust Idols,” in S. Brent Plate, Religion, 222 where he writes, “as long as the image, whatever its form, points beyond itself to tell something of the memory it invokes and yes, even the mystery it conceals or guards, the difference it points to, then it is an effective icon. Icons become idols only when a mistake of interpretation is made: when the voyeur mistakes the part for the whole, the artifact for the events that produced it or the ideologies that have put it on display.”
begin a series of encounters which prompt the imagination of a new future, and the concrete building of that future reality. The aim, as with classical icons, must be to open the dialogue. It is this capacity which is lacking, to different degrees, in the Ste. Famille Church and in the memorial church at Ntarama, but which blossoms in the church in Kibuye. Standing apart from many Rwanda churches by combining memorial with active worship, Kibuye stands as a living site dedicated to both remembrance and a future hope. Those who traverse the threshold of the church come not simply to remember, but to live in the midst of memory. Neither fetishizing nor eliding its history, Kibuye instead claims it boldly as it looks forward. Kibuye thus exists as a meeting ground of radical presence that preserves the memories of violence even as it seeks to create a new future. Traversing the worlds of the living and the dead, memory exists here not for consumption, but for encounter, fulfilling the goal expressed so often in contemporary Rwandan society of “living together,” not merely among survivors and perpetrators, but even with the dead.

1. Without Memory – The Church of Ste. Famille, Kigali

The Roman Catholic church of Ste. Famille is located in of Kiyovu, the central district of Kigali. Situated on the primary roundabout entering the city, the church is a large and imposing structure of brick, noteworthy for the massive cross built into the façade of the building. It sits within substantive grounds that are surrounded by a high brick wall. The church is positioned such that the cross is visible from the main roundabout, thus visible to any person descending the main hill of Kiyovu, and inescapable for those entering the city by the same route. Only a few blocks away from the main private bus terminal in Kiyovu, the high-rise buildings of the city center, and the shopping, business, and entertainment complex housed in the new Kigali City
Tower, Ste. Famille is perhaps the most visible church in the city, a reality which has been the case for many years.

Sainte Famille Roman Catholic Church, Kiyovu, Kigali

Given its large wall separating the grounds, Ste. Famille became a place of refuge during the genocide for both Tutsi and moderate Hutu seeking to escape the militia. Early in April of 1994, persons had gathered at Ste. Famille as well as the neighboring Roman Catholic Church of St. Paul, and the nearby Centre d’Education de Langues Africaines (CELA) for safety as the slaughter in Kigali began. When Fr. Anaclet Mwumvaneza, the priest overseeing the parish, would not allow the militia entry, his life was threatened and he had to escape to the neighboring
St. Paul Church. As a result, another priest, Fr. Wenceslas Munyeshyaka, described by Brother Damascène Ndayambaje as a “chaplain of the militia,” took charge of the church.195

A frightening figure who today lives in France sheltered by the Catholic Church while awaiting trial, Munyeshyaka196 was responsible for setting the rules for the Tutsi refugees who had gathered inside the church.197 Throughout the genocide, wearing a flak jacket and armed with a pistol,198 Munyeshyaka was aware of the attacks, often present in the church or on church grounds as the killings happened, and repeatedly withheld food and aid from the Tutsi, while simultaneously providing it to the Hutu refugees gathered inside the Church grounds.

His actions have been well documented and contributed to the depth of the horror of the killings at Ste. Famille, making the site one of several in the country where priests were actively involved in contributing to the slaughter of those they were charged to protect.199 On 15 April, 120 people chosen by the interahamwe and presidential guard were taken away from the church and killed while Munyeshyaka stood by and watched. The names of those selected and killed had been on a list which Munyeshyaka helped develop. Then on 22 April CELA was attacked and a group of thirty-five men and boys were killed. Munyeshyaka is cited as having visited the Centre on 12 April, and when refugees refused to turn over a key to a room to which he had demanded access, he left angered with the words “wait, you will see.”200 Following the massacre, Munyeshyaka is cited as having referred to survivors who had escaped to Ste. Famille as “the

199 See also, for example, Fr. Athanase Seromba and his actions contributing to the deaths of 2000 persons at the Roman Catholic Church of Nyange. Seromba ordered the church be bulldozed to kill those inside, and then proceeded to shoot survivors of the collapse as they tried to escape the rubble.
200 African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 6.
innocent ones,” thus disingenuously suggesting that the men and boys killed were RPF\textsuperscript{201} collaborators.

Another massacre occurred on 17 June when Munyeshyaka told those at Ste. Famille that the RPF had killed all Hutus seeking refuge at St. Paul; this was a direct and intentional lie meant to exacerbate tensions between Hutu and Tutsi refugees at Ste. Famille. Warning those at the church that they should expect reprisal, Munyeshyaka then met with leaders of the militia, who arrived shortly thereafter to massacre seventy Tutsi refugees. Their bodies were left in the courtyard in front of his sitting room for three days, and Munyeshyaka even went so far as to claim that the Tutsi had “killed themselves.”\textsuperscript{202} He later ordered the bodies to be hidden to prevent the discovery of what had happened at the church by the western press.\textsuperscript{203} Two days later he granted permission for another seventeen men to be taken away, who were later killed.\textsuperscript{204} Later, when the evacuation finally began to move Tutsi to safe RPF-controlled areas of the city, he solicited lists of the Tutsi for “evacuation,” but turned the lists over to the militia.\textsuperscript{205}

During the course of the genocide at Ste. Famille, men and young boys were targeted, as Munyeshyaka claimed that women did not have “ethnic”\textsuperscript{206} identity. He did manage to save the lives of several women and young girls, and is noted to have given them special treatment and supplies, in return for raping them. In fact, only two women were killed at Ste. Famille, one of

\textsuperscript{201} The RPF, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, was the “rebel” army which attempted to forcibly re-enter Rwanda in 1990. It was comprised largely of second-generation Tutsi exiles from Rwanda born and raised in Uganda. Though historically from Tutsi families, many of the RPF intentionally identified themselves as “Rwandan,” noting the primacy of their identity as exiles of Rwanda over their identity as Tutsi.

\textsuperscript{202} Testimony of Emile Rukundo, factory-worker, African Rights, \textit{Father Wenceslas}, 90.

\textsuperscript{203} Testimony of Malik Murashi, primary school pupil, African Rights, \textit{Father Wenceslas}, 30.

\textsuperscript{204} African Rights, \textit{Father Wenceslas}, 6.

\textsuperscript{205} Additionally, on 1 May, twelve persons were killed and 113 injured in a horrific mortar attack on the church. Melvern, \textit{Conspiracy}, 226ff, and Dallaire, \textit{Shake Hands}, 348.

\textsuperscript{206} Though constructed as “ethnic,” identity in Rwanda was a far more complex process grounded in economic status and then solidified and racialized under the control of the Belgian Colonial Authority.
whom, Hyacinth – the daughter of Rose Rwanga - refused to engage in sexual activity with Munyeshyaka. 207

Little question remains of Munyeshyaka’s political affiliations. Jean-Claude Rwabakika, a data processor states this plainly: “Wenceslas Munyeshyaka treated the Tutsi refugees as traitors to the nation of Rwanda.” 208 Speaking of the Tutsi refugees, Paulin Munyemana relates that Munyeshyaka claimed: “they must all be killed.” 209 Jérôme Berete remembers how Munyeshyaka tried to kill him for drinking water the priest “had reserved for ‘beautiful girls.’” 210

Enock Kayonga notes how Munyeshyaka cultivated a close and ongoing relationship with the killers, inviting militia members to share drinks with him “almost every day.” 211 And this allegiance is clear even in Munyeshyaka’s own words. Regularly referring to the Tutsi refugees as traitors in both sermons and in conversation, 212 Munyeshyaka, in a letter co-signed with twenty-eight other priests to the Pope in 2 August 1994, states:

Everybody knows, except those who do not wish to know or understand it, that the massacres which took place in Rwanda are the result of the provocation and of the harassment of the Rwandanese people by the RPF…. We dare even to confirm that the number of Hutu civilians killed by the army of the RPF exceeds by far the Tutsi victims of ethnic troubles. 213

Horribly misguided and tremendously factually inaccurate, this claim even seeks to justify or reduce the significance of the Genocide Against the Tutsi by reducing the entire event to a set of mutual reprisal killings, a strategy now common among genocide deniers in Rwanda.

The violations which occurred at Ste. Famille were dramatic and deep. Here a priest contributed to the genocide through both passive acceptance and active effort. The head of the

207 Testimony of Rose Rwanda, African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 77-79.
208 Testimony of Jean Claude Rwabakika, data processor, African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 21.
209 Testimony of Paulin Munyemana, shopkeeper, African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 12.
210 Testimony of Jérôme Berete, employee in printing works, African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 14.
211 Testimony of Enock Kayonga, businessman, African Rights, Father Wenceslas, 34.
church itself at the time thus sought the destruction of those gathered within the high walls of Ste. Famille for safety and refuge. One of the more dramatic examples of priests engaged in crimes of genocide, though unfortunately far from the only example, Ste. Famille today must bear this history, even as it continues to function as an active church.

Given the events which transpired here, and the place of prominence within the city that Ste. Famille occupies, one would expect to find some memorialization of those who were killed on site, some recognition of its history in 1994. And while Ste. Famille may have avoided the scale of massacre that transpired in other locations, it is nonetheless true that it was a particularly disturbing site of both terror and killing during the genocide. Today, however, nothing exists to mark the events which transpired there. From all external appearances to a visitor, this is a site without history. The congregation continues as before the genocide, celebrating Mass regularly within the same space where in 1994, as journalist Aiden Hartley has noted, “some nights the militia would hammer holes through church walls and drag youths away.”

While speaking to persons today at Ste. Famille can elicit details of the events that therein transpired, one must seek out this history. The roundabout upon which the church lies is today known as the Place de l’Unité, a stark irony considering the massacres which transpired mere feet from it today remain without memorialization in the parish of Ste. Famille. Filled with life, song, worship, and praise, Ste. Famille continues today with virtually no acknowledgment of its history. Having abdicated any responsibility for remembrance, save for a few brief moments annually during the national period of mourning, this history slowly drifts into the past as the church marches on amid the bustle of downtown Kigali.

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2. Existence as Tomb and Ossuary – The Roman Catholic Church of Ntarama

I wrote these words following my first visit to the memorial at Ntarama:

It’s three dimensional. That’s the worst part. It’s not even a stain. It’s the most hideous sculpture imaginable. Like the macabre imagination of an impressionist overzealous with his paint on the canvas. But here the canvas is brick, and the paint…

The road to the Ntarama memorial church, like so many in Rwanda, is red dirt. And during the dry season, your arrival at the site cannot be missed by those living in the area. A cloud of red silt billows in the distance behind your vehicle during the several kilometer drive off of the main tarred road from Kigali. Periodically as the dust cloud approaches, children appear to wave, often in their blue and yellow school uniforms. Depending on the time of day, arrival at Ntarama entails being greeted by children, until you pass through the wrought iron fence and gates that now separate this church from the area around it. Defined and set apart, entering into the Ntarama compound is today to cross a threshold, leaving behind ordinary life, stepping forward into what is today the quiet horror of history.

Beginning on 7 April, the interahamwe215 began burning houses and forcing the Tutsi population of Ntarama toward the church. As described by a survivor, Callixte, persons came to the church expecting safety, as had been the case in each of the previous outbreaks of mass violence in Rwanda over the previous thirty years; “we thought this was God’s house, no one would attack us here.”216 10 April saw an increase in the forces of the interahamwe, and by 14 April the Tutsi population of Ntarama had been pushed inside the church seeking refuge. Attacks began the same day, and the actual killing started the following day when the Presidential Guard arrived. Somewhere in the order of five thousand persons had gathered at the church when the interahamwe and the Presidential Guard commenced the extermination. The slaughter started

215 Ikinyarwanda for “those who work together,” a reference to the Belgian corvée system of enforced communal labor for authorities, these were the mobile trained local killing units.
216 Related by Mamdani, When Victims, 4.
first with clubs and machetes, and continued later with guns and grenades, locking people within the building as grenades were thrown inside, and killing any person who attempted to escape. Within a day, nearly all were dead.

The entire memorial compound is today enclosed by wrought iron fencing and a small gatehouse lies aside the entrance where guides wait to greet visitors and explain the history of the church. Inside the compound lie the remains of the three structures, protected by new metal roofs to shield the buildings from the heavy rains which descend on Rwanda twice annually. In the front of the compound lie the church sanctuary and the sacristy under a single new roof, and behind these remnants under a separate protective structure lies a badly damaged building that contained both the church kitchen and the Sunday School.

The church itself is badly damaged. Many of the original windows were destroyed in the explosions and the roof is marred by bullet holes. Inside, the clothing of those killed lines the walls and hangs from the ceiling. A mixture of red earth and red blood stains everything. In the front, near the altar, artifacts are displayed. An identity card, a pair of glasses, ballpoint pens, and dozens of rosary beads hang from a nylon green cord directly in front of the vessel once containing the sacramental host. Upon new metal shelves lie the goods that had been used during the days leading up to the killings as persons took shelter in the building. Plastic washing tubs, enameled metal bowls, mugs for tea and coffee, empty cans of food, a thermos, clay pots, water cans, baskets, and a few trunks holding the scarce belongings that persons tried to preserve as they escaped to the church are all piled upon three shelves, illuminated by the light streaming through the opening that once housed a blue tinted stained glass window. Outside, as one moves to the empty sacristy, a separate small structure itself badly damaged, one can see a cross through
the destroyed frame of those same windows, where only a single pane of the patchwork colored glass remains intact.

![Ntarama Roman Catholic Church, Ntarama](image)

**Ntarama Roman Catholic Church, Ntarama**

Inside the sanctuary, a few coffins draped in cloth lie at the front of room. The majority of human remains, however, lie on metal shelves at the back of the church framed by pennant banners the distinctive shade of purple that historically represented memorialization in Rwanda. Bones, divided anatomically by type, common practice throughout the country – a

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217 Commencing with the 19th Commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide Against the Tutsi of 1994, Rwanda has changed the official color for memorialization to grey, in an effort to return to older Rwandan practices that used grey ash for remembrance and memorialization of the dead.
practice compounding the identification challenges which plagues medical anthropologists – lie neatly stacked in rows. Given the overhang of the new metal protection structure, and the clothes hung in front of many of the windows, much of the room is dark and damp. No longer a sanctuary, the room is now to enter a tomb that is a place of horror and memory.

Behind the main structure, under a separate new metal canopy, lies a third building. The back half of the building is blown open and little remains there other than the remnants of a hearth around which food was prepared in this kitchen, and the tattered clothing of those who died there. The front half of the structure was once the Sunday School. There are concrete benches set in the floor, small seats really, not too far above the floor, clearly not intended for the adults that now often sit there for a moment of quiet reflection. Sitting, uncomfortable, too close to the floor, in a place they were never meant to be, in a place that should be filled with life, song, and laughter.

The room is today completely barren. The site of some of the most horrific actions which transpired at Ntarama, this is the room that contains the “stain.” It is an image I have carried every day since my first trip to Rwanda, an image that never really leaves my mind. In the back left of the room, against the wall lies a large patch where the bricks are discolored. Instead of killing with machetes, clubs, or bullets, when the génocidières entered the Sunday School, they decided instead to kill the children by breaking their heads against the wall. It’s three dimensional. That’s the worst part. It’s not even a stain. It’s the most hideous sculpture imaginable. Like the macabre imagination of an impressionist overzealous with his paint on the canvas. But here the canvas is brick, and the paint...

I wrote these reflections upon my first visit, shortly after the experience had reduced me to uncontrollable tears. This space continues to defy my understanding, especially as a person
who has worked with children for more than two decades. The stain is indeed three dimensional, where blood, brain, and bone adhere to brick, a place so beyond any cleansing that none was even attempted. But of course, it is a lie to say that the three dimensionality is the “worst part.” *The worst part is that it is made of the blood and brain of children.* The second time I visited Ntarama, upon visiting the Sunday School, I could no longer speak. By the third time I could no longer enter into the room.

A small percentage of the names of those killed are now engraved into a concrete wall that surrounds some of the memorial gardens just outside the Sunday School. Built in the same style as the memorial walls at the national memorial in Gisozi in Kigali, and the memorial church of Nyarubuye in the Eastern Province, names are being added slowly to the wall as time and budget allows. Itself a light grey, it is often stained red from the soil, bitterly evocative of what happened here. The rest of the grounds, similar to what are found in many memorials across the country, contain large beds of colorful flowers. Fragrant, and incredibly varied, the flowers today burst forth in an exuberant display of life. The gardens are designed for reflection, and serve as a powerful transition away from the tombs and back toward the life which continues on the other side of the fences, where once again children are often present waiting to greet visitors or ask for money.

Ntarama today therefore functions both as memorial and tomb. And while it does exist as an education center calling toward its history, its status as a sacred space is one which has been completely lost. Once consecrated, once holy, today Ntarama serves a radically different function, with appeals to its status as a religious space merely serving to deepen the horror of what transpired within its walls. There is no sense or understanding of the divine as resting within the space, the vessel for the host itself even relegated to being half-hidden behind the new
metal structures designed to hold the former possessions of the dead now occupying the place of prominence.

Everything within the memorial points only to the fact that it was a religious space; now its sacred nature merely heightens the violations. The parallel is thus drawn between the violation of individuals, whether through rape or murder, and the violation of space, where blood flowed across the altar. Human remains and possessions are displayed as testament to history, to ensure – as is the case behind the proliferation of memorials across the country – that the events here could neither be denied nor forgotten.

As a result of this status, the degree to which Ntarama functions within the daily life of the community is greatly lessened. This is, of course, not to say forgotten. No abdication of memory for the survivors of such a place is possible, and the church continues to exist as an uncleanseable stain in the history of the community. Nonetheless, the spaces remain discrete, distinct, set apart from the rest of life. Literally walled off my metal bars, this is a space that one must choose to enter. And as such, aside from the annual memorial period where it takes center stage in the processes of remembrance, it caters largely to expatriates and foreigners who have come to Ntarama – who have often come to Rwanda itself – to visit such spaces and learn the history. Listed on the official Aegis-CNLG\(^{218}\) webpage and in official government publications as a primary official national memorial, and barely an hour’s drive from Kigali, it constitutes part of the “genocide tour” undertaken by many visitors to the country.

To an extent, this serves a powerful purpose. It educates foreigners about what happened in 1994, with visceral objects and images that cannot be unseen. Designed to sear their way into the psyche, the artifacts and human remains serve well to dispel any potential of genocide.

\(^{218}\) A joint effort of the Aegis Trust and the Commission National de Lutte contre le Génocide (National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide).
deniability. Any yet, one must still choose to see, to enter the spaces, to be confronted with the realities that dominate the remnants of these buildings, a choice which is neither necessary nor obligatory for either members of the community or visitors.

While demanding repeated encounter with such realities is surely beyond what could be reasonably or ethically be expected, it remains nonetheless true that memorials like Ntarama do indeed contain and compartmentalize genocide in a way that is impossible in the actual experiences of individuals. They make a clear claim that the events which transpired there are uncleansable, and while this is certainly correct, such memorials also accomplish little by way of encouraging conversation about how to engage with the horrors of such stains. In short, memorials like Ntarama are designed to foster a stunned silence rather than conversation.

One of the difficulties with a memorial like Ntarama, in terms of discussions on reconciliation or forgiveness, lies in the fact that time functions unidirectionally in such a space. To be at Ntarama, or to be at other memorials built similarly (Nyamata, Nyarubuye, Nyange), is always to be facing the past. Further, it is to face the past within a physically and mentally separated space that compartmentalizes horror as if to make it more mentally accessible. This may be understandable when one considers the human attempt to compartmentalize as a method of coping when integration into one’s identity is too difficult (precisely the disjunction that re-emerges in many instances of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder when this compartmentalization fails). This unidirectional focus of time within compartmentalized space directed solely toward remembrance does little, however, to contributes to the dialogues so present in Rwanda about its future. It is certainly a true claim that remembrance is necessary. Yet in its simplicity, this platitude fails to engage with the complexities of how this remembrance must be integrated into the future life of the community. And the reality is that communities like Ntarama bear this past
regardless of the local memorial. It would seem a reasonable demand, then, that the memorial become a part of this dialogue, both for the practical future of the community, and as a sign of respect to the dead.

To be clear, the gardens outside the church are intended to begin this process. The flowers are a symbol of the unassailable life which continues, springing forth from the same ground that once ran red with blood. An unabashed reference to the irrepressible nature of life, the flower garden both represents the beauty and diversity of those lost, and begins to point forward in time. As such, they do represent a first step forward for the visitor to ponder the life which remains in the aftermath of places like Ntarama. Like the schoolchildren who also play outside of the similar memorial at Nyamata, these tomb-memorials provide a stark disjunct between life and death, bringing the boundary between worlds into palpable focus. And yet, this is where any discussion ends. The flowers, though beautiful, are not what most remember upon leaving Ntarama. And given the example to which we will now turn, one must wonder if more might be done in these tomb-churches to foster the kind of discussion that could lead both to dialogue and to the integration of these events into the identity of individuals and of the community, rather than relegating them to a display of compartmentalized horror.

3. Hybrid Living Spaces – The Roman Catholic Church at Kibuye

The sanctuary at Kibuye is a space bathed in blood. To the left of the entrance, skulls face visitors who enter this Roman Catholic church in the town of Kibuye, where some of the most complete massacres of the Rwandan genocide took place in 1994. To the right of the entrance a machete that had been used in the slaughter lies astride the stairs. Passing between the skulls and

219 As noted repeatedly in the memorial log books for Ntarama, it is the horrific aspects of the memorial’s past that dominate visitors’ experiences. The gardens are virtually never mentioned.
the machete, one enters a sanctuary where nearly 12,000 women, men, and children were
bombed, cut, raped, tortured, and killed. And one also enters a sanctuary that is alive with
activity; children in Sunday School, priests preparing for service, and choir members practicing
all flaunt the boldness of life, bathed in the colored light streaming through the new stained glass
windows. As Susan J. Brison writes in *Aftermath*, “life, profligate, irrepressible – flaunts itself
everywhere.” The sanctuary lives as a place where the decaying blood of the dead and the
pulsing blood of the living mingle together.

The Roman Catholic church in Kibuye is located in Karongi district, in the west of
Rwanda alongside the eastern shores of Lake Kivu, across the lake from the Democratic
Republic of the Congo. It is situated on the loop road that connects the business center of Kibuye
to the lakeside resorts, and is a brief ten minute walk from the center of town. Constructed in
1963 from stones quarried on site, it is perched atop one of many hill-peninsulas that protrude
into the lake, and is thus met on all sides with views of the water. On 17 April, nearly 12,000
persons were killed at the site. Their bodies were left untouched for a week, at which point the
bodies were pushed by bulldozer into a mass grave behind the church.

For many years the church sat empty as a controversy ensued concerning what to do with
the structure. With calls from the local bishop and from many members of the Kibuye
congregation, an agreement was eventually reached that allowed the resumption of services
provided another memorial would be built on site. Thus in 2001, a small memorial was
constructed outside the main church structure. The memorial shrine today includes a mass grave
where many of the victims’ remains are currently buried, many of which were exhumed as a part

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221 James. M. Smith and Carol Rittner, “Churches as Memorial Sites,” in Rittner, Roth and Whitmore, *Genocide*,
184.
of the activities of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in an effort by forensic experts to establish proof of the actions of the génocidières that transpired at this site.222

Constructed by both members of the church and prisoners awaiting trial for genocide and crimes against humanity223 – itself a complicated testament to reconciliation considering such remunerative actions often drew benefits in sentencing for the accused – the text upon the walls is broken into three passages. On the left it reads “We remember that this horror of killing trampled humanity underfoot.” The center, “We lacked brotherhood.” And to the right, “Let us ask for mercy so that this horror does not happen again.”

External Memorial and Ossuary of Roman Catholic Church of Kibuye

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This textual triptych may be understood as one of remembrance, acknowledgement, and supplication. The narrative begins with the phrase now found on every memorial in the country “Twibuke,” “we remember” or “let us remember,” itself as iconic as the Québécois “Je me souviens,” or the Holocaust-related “never forget, never again.” From the onset, it thus initiates at once the process of recollection, and issues a demand for that very recollection. “We remember what happened here, we remember this history: it cannot and will not be forgotten.” It acknowledges both what occurred and that this action was one for which persons bear responsibility due to a lack of “brotherhood.” Finally, it offers a statement that comes close to a corporate apology. Interestingly, when the memorial speaks of asking for mercy, it asks that all persons who visit the space ask for mercy, not merely the perpetrators. Responsibility is a shared enterprise, and the skulls placed prominently at the center of the memorial shrine serve to recall to the visitor those to whom this responsibility is owed. The presence of the dead, the responsibility toward the dead, is not theoretical. It is visceral.

It is in this context of remembrance, acknowledgement and supplication that one now always proceeds into the church itself. This shrine is today widely understood to be the “memorial” proper to the Kibuye site, and in a sense this is clearly the case. It was constructed precisely for this purpose. In truth, however, the process of memorialization extends far beyond this small shrine. The church grounds themselves – and specifically the artwork inside the building – establish the Kibuye church complex in its entirety as a memorial with depth and scope far beyond that of the new memorial shrine alone. As a memorial complex, it facilitates encounter between the visitor or congregant and the dead which share the space through the performance of a theological demand for recognition and responsibility.
Passing by the memorial shrine, one begins to ascend the steps to the church, entering a liminal space between memorial and sanctuary, between the site constructed to house the remains of the dead, and the site where the killings themselves were carried out. To the right of the stairs lies a machete found on the site.

![Machete at Entrance, Roman Catholic Church of Kibuye](image)

A complicated object in Rwanda today, holding status both as a common tool and a reminder of the genocide, the machete is a marker of this liminal place between life and death. An ordinary tool for the living transformed into the bearer of death it is placed between the memorial dedicated to the dead and the sanctuary that has been re-consecrated as a place for the living to worship. It serves as a reminder that these worlds never remain as separate as they might initially seem, that to be in Kibuye is to exist between worlds, among the living and the dead.

Upon entering the church, this hybridity is woven not merely into the entrance, but into the very body of the sanctuary. At the very front of the church, placed above the altar, and as such neatly dividing the Stations of the Cross in half, lies an extraordinary mural.
It depicts a group of Rwandans, including women with infants strapped to their backs, carrying crosses upon their bodies up to the top of a hill. The prominence of the color red evokes the death that inevitably waits at the top of the hill the figures slowly ascend. The mural at once echoes both Calvary and the ascent to the nearby tall hill Bisesero, a place of resistance, where the Tutsi population fought back the génocidaires, where nearly 50,000 sought refuge, and 1,500 survived.

In light of the analogy to Bisesero, this mural must be understood as something more than a simple march toward death. For even on Calvary, there were what might be termed
“survivors.” Both the one that is claimed textually to gain an eternal life through a final act of recognition in his own final moments of crucifixion, and, of course, the figure of Christ who though destroyed is able to overcome the horrors of suffering. In each case, the suffering remains present and critical, but in such Christian discourses never attains status as the final word. The ascent to the hill is an injustice, one memorialized and never forgotten, and the decision to commemorate ascent is a decision to commemorate not death itself, but the extreme injustices undergone. Surely, for so very many this has resulted in death, as the bones on display at Bisesero eternally attest. But there must ever remain a non-defeatist quality in this ascent. Calling attention to injustice by commemorating ascent directs focus toward future injustices which can be remedied before the ascent is completed, before death occurs. Pointing toward the dual stories of Calvary and Bisesero, this commemoration of ascent is a reminder that one need not tacitly accept injustice. One is never a mere passive object rendered beyond agency. No matter the situation, one always retains the ability to fight back, to counter injustice, to attempt to change the situation.

Every single time I was told the story of Bisesero in Rwanda, that 50,000 ascended the hill and that 1500 survived, the person narrating the story reiterated, “but 1500 survived.” The mural seems therefore to speak: “I carry this cross, this symbol of injustice that you must look upon. You may not forget what has been done to me. But I am no passive participant in the injustice carried out upon my body.” Just as the people gathered on Bisesero fought back with stones and sticks – the same media traditionally used for stoning or crucifixion – so too may the injustice thrust upon one in the form of a cross to bear be used to counter the same injustice. A cross can be, and in certain ways has always been within Christian theology, the ultimate weapon. It is at once a symbol not merely of injustice and death, but of the possibility that
injustice might be overcome precisely when one looks upon the face of the one wronged, when one sees the alterity inherent within her, and responds.

This mural facilitates the same kind of recognition called for by the skulls that greet visitors outside of the main church building. It is an encounter with the dead in a moment of injustice. The depiction of Christ in the mural, importantly, stands by present with those suffering, in love of recognition. The figure of Christ in the mural stands in solidarity with those for whom injustice is immanent, for whom death and suffering are unavoidable. Creating a hybrid story, this mural melds together both religious and local imagery to speak of the horrors of violence never suffered alone, and – given the analogies to Bisesero – and the reality that these horrors are never inevitable. A new life may always still ensue. Directly across from the mural lies a chain of paper doves, serving to remind the visitor or congregant that the new purpose of this space – even as it commemorates the horrors and injustices suffered there – is one of promise and peacemaking. At once horrific and hopeful, like many interpretations of the Christian story of crucifixion, the mural takes center stage in this space of conflict and peace.

*Paper doves opposite altar mural, Roman Catholic Church of Kibuye*

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To the left of the altar, in a small room behind a distinctively purple curtain (the same shade of purple used until recently to demote remembrance in Rwanda), lies a life-sized crucifix. Hidden from direct view, but with no restriction of access, this crucifix is the focal point of a small chapel. It too is bathed in blood, even as it is eternally tinted by the colored light streaming through the new stained glass windows, windows that were replaced after the genocide, the original ones having been blown out by grenades. Blood covers the crucifix, not merely from the wounds traditionally depicted, but streaming down every inch of the body. Herein there is a clear association between the blood bathing the walls of the church, and the blood that bathes this image of the suffering Christ. Further, it is important to note that the figure of Jesus is still alive. This is a commemoration of suffering as much as it is of death. It is a claim that the divine stands in solidarity with the living and the dead. As the wounds upon the body of Jesus are commemorated, so too does this crucifix recall the wounds of those who perished here. Both the suffering Christ and those who had gathered with this sacred space were cut, speared, broken. The chapel stands in quiet solidarity with the deceased, the injured and the survivors of atrocity and injustice.
The imagery of the chapel also, however, initiates a certain kind of conversation. Behind the gruesome crucifix stands another mural dominated by red tones, showing Rwandan persons with the transfigured Holy Family. Images of ordinary Rwandans are present in this chapel amid images of both the suffering and transfigured Christ – now depicted as a child, innocent and pure – weaving a story in picture of the constant presence of both memory and hope. The contrast between the suffering Christ and the transfigured child-Christ is stark, and the chapel holds both images in tension. This statement of visual theology suggests that as one may not forget what has happened in the Christian story of the passion, so too one may not forget what has happened in this space. Death and a new future in life both exist simultaneously. It is an image that cannot but call out for justice: one found in remembrance, encounter, and recognition existing through this solidarity forged in a suffering and transfigured Christ. As Emilie Townes has written,
solidarity is something that is nurtured and grown:
in the yearning for and living out of justice
solidarity comes from hard work
listening
hearing
analyzing
questioning
rethinking
accepting
rejecting
it comes from a place of respecting and being respected.”

In Levinasian terms, the living at Kibuye enact ethical responsibility to dead Others in the midst of their very remains through persistent acts of recognition wherein agents stand in solidarity with those who suffer injustice. Through the memorial shrine and the images in the church, the dead are given voice to demand recognition backed by the solidarity of the divine. Not merely a Husserlian re-presencing, this recognition is what R. Clifton Spargo has termed a “vigilant memory.” Through the initiation of a conversation between the living and the dead, one made possible by the iconography present in the church that consistently draws the visitor or congregant beyond simple looking into encounter, this “vigilant memory” is a mourning memory that is an ethical relation to the Other. It embodies an active engagement with the alterity that resides in the loss itself, an engagement where blood and light mingle in dialogue as a new future is constructed with the dead.

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225 Townes, Womanist Ethics, 155.
226 For Husserl, remembrance involves intentional activity that re-presences a former idea to the conscious mind. Bound and limited by the intentionality directed at them, remembrances are defined by the intentional content of the mind. It is the mind that bestows meaning upon memory, rather than (as in Levinas) re-presencing an Other through memory that retains the capacity to bestow meaning upon the self.
227 R. Clifton Spargo, Vigilant Memory: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust, and the Unjust Death (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
Life among the dead – The Possibilities within Hybrid Spaces

In *Vigilant Memory*, R. Clifton Spargo suggests that “to speak for the other who dies is to return her impossible perspective to the idiom, now revised or reimagined, of practical possibility.”\(^{228}\) Closely following Levinas, Spargo claims that in the relationship with death “it is quite as though the other who has died... could refuse the meaninglessness of her own death.”\(^{229}\) For Levinas, the primary human interaction is between the self and the Other, wherein the Other one encounters places a demand for respect upon the self. This moment is both complete and unavoidable. In encounter one discovers that one is “always already” responsible, that one is called into action just as one is called to responsibility, and that both moments begin with the process of recognition. Speaking the *hineni*, the *me voici*, the “here I am,” the Other as encountered initiates ethics through an unabashed and complete demand for recognition, even as this demand is issued in complete humility from a place Levinas will describe alternately as nakedness or defenselessness. As Levinas has noted, even murder – even the greatest horrors of genocide – cannot annihilate the alterity of the Other. As we have seen in Part I, this is a critical moment in Levinas, because if responsibility for the Other is conditioned and initiated by the alterity itself, even death cannot annihilate this alterity. That is to say, an ethical relationship and responsibility to the Other is possible even after death. Through the memorialization present at Kibuye, the murdered victim is thereby returned to a presence where there is naught *but* vulnerability, and wherein the victim still calls out for recognition, for response, for action.

It is this remarkable possibility that Spargo seeks to convey in the term “vigilant memory”\(^{230}\) which is not memory properly speaking as re-presencing in the Husserlian sense but

\(^{228}\) Spargo, *Vigilant Memory*, 44.
\(^{229}\) Spargo, *Vigilant Memory*, 45.
\(^{230}\) Spargo, *Vigilant Memory*, 46.
rather a mourning memory that is an ethical relation to the Other in an active engagement with the alterity that is embodied in the loss itself. To suggest this possibility is not to mediate the horror which does persist unquenchable in the termination of the being of the Other. And yet it is, on the contrary, to suggest that responsibility is not bound by the actual event of death, that murder cannot annihilate responsibility. It is to imagine the possibility, as Spargo has noted, that it is not the living who bestow meaning upon the dead.\textsuperscript{231} It is instead to acknowledge the possibility, even the extreme probability whose ethical demands are inescapable, that it is the dead who might yet bestow meaning upon the living.

In Rwanda it is said that there can be no reconciliation, no forgiveness, and no enduring peace, without remembrance. Rarely, however, are both the past and the future woven so tightly together in one space. Kibuye, as a place of peacemaking bathed in the colored light of new stained glass windows, windows set within walls once bathed in blood, exemplifies this hybrid ethical identity. It claims with reverence – though without hesitation – its role as a center of both memory and hope, as it demands a recognition of injustice and of the dead. And as such it firmly establishes itself as a memorial icon.

In Ntarama, it may well be that the stain itself – that horrific assemblage of material in the back of a Sunday school room, seared by hatred into the brick wall – makes the reclamation of this place impossible. Whether it should be cleaned, and whether it could ever be cleansed, remains a question for those families who lost their children in this place, and is most certainly not a matter for a foreign scholar to decide. Regardless of whether it is ever removed, any attempt akin to what has transpired at Ste. Famille to elide the history and continue with business as normal, would seems to be an equally misguided attempt. The lack of a substantial memorial

\textsuperscript{231} Spargo, \textit{Vigilant Memory}, 47.
at Ste. Famille is an injustice needing rectification, and at the very least, a memorial ought to be developed on the external grounds of the church in the coming years.

The question of what ought to be done at Ntarama, however, is much more difficult. It is certainly the case that the success of the middle ground developed in a church like that in Kibuye depends on the ability to lessen the viscerality of the horrors that therein transpired, even if one still faces the history directly. Daily existence or Mass in the midst of something like the stain at Ntarama surely would be impossible, and it may well be that the injustice which would result in any cleaning lies precisely in the fact that it would force persons – anyone charged with the macabre task – into a situation no agent should be asked to endure. Ntarama may well be beyond reclamation. And yet, reconciliation and healing do indeed take place in Ntarama, though away from the memorial, facilitated instead (as we saw in Part I) through events like a new housing project for survivors built in part by the génocidières during their criminal sentence as part of the Rwandan government’s remarkable experiment in restorative justice. Whether anything more can be done within the memorial itself at Ntarama remains an open question, though further development of the external grounds of the memorial would be an important first step. And while not intending to suggest that the entirety of the space at Ntarama could be reclaimed, it is important to remember that there was also a time when Kibuye’s church was considered beyond reclamation.

The third, hybrid style of the memorial and church at Kibuye is effective as a direct result of the way it integrates memorial into daily life, for to exist within the church at Kibuye is to walk among and with the dead. Bathed in blood and light, it is to imagine a new future of which even the dead remain a part. It is to enact daily the claim central to both Christian theology and to Levinasian theory, that death while a tragic – sometimes horrifying – event, does not conquer
the essence of the Other. Thus through the process of memorialization that is woven into the church at Kibuye, the dead are restored to an impossible presence. Through the presence of these images and through the dialogue they initiate in their status as icon, the church avoids the danger of becoming either a fetishized possession-memory or a mere tomb.

The memorialization processes at Kibuye fundamentally elicit a recognition of absolute alterity through encounter with the dead, and thereby guarantee that ethical responsibility will be conveyed upon any visitor to the site. Originally created as a place for encounter with what in Christian terms has long been understood as the absolute Other, the divine, in light of the horrors which have transpired in this place there is perhaps no more appropriate theological response than that this church remain an active congregation. For within these grounds one may encounter once again that radical alterity in numerous forms. The church today serves as a place to shelter the witness who refuses to turn away from those ascending the hill, to provide an eternal home for the suffering one calling out for justice, and to remind all of the transfigured hope for a new future represented in the radical image of the divine child in the chapel. And the moment one turns to depart the grounds, the deep potential which resides within the radiant symbol of this child becomes visceral, as one returns again to greet the children so often encountered outside, playing soccer in view of the skulls.
Compelled to Forgive: Competing Discourses Among Rwandan Christians

‘Forgiveness died in the death camps,’ he [Jankélévitch] says. Yes. Unless it only becomes possible from the moment that it appears impossible. Its history would begin, on the contrary, with the unforgivable.

-Jacques Derrida

Today Rwandans are reconciling and living peacefully. Survivors are courageously coming to terms with the past and some have started joint initiatives with families of victims and released perpetrators and stories of forgiveness and confession are emerging countrywide.233

A mile above sea level on the equator, the sun is particularly bright. It was one of those blindingly bright days, days where my light Danish eyes struggled to keep attentive to what was going on around me as the countryside zipped by. I was on my way to the Bisesero memorial high in the mountains above Lake Kivu, in the west of Rwanda. At one point my friend James, who had graciously offered to drive me to the remote memorial, began to slow down and pulled the car to the side of the road. In moments I found myself following him away from the car into a field as he told me the story of where his parents had hidden during the genocide. As we stopped walking I found myself looking at a shallow ditch under a few trees on the edge of the field. There could only be one reason that we had come to this place. “This is where they found my

233 Reconciliation Work in Rwanda (Kigali, Rwanda: National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, October, 2009), 21.
parents’ bodies,” he said quietly. Both parents and much of his family were murdered during the hundred days of 1994 when violence enveloped the country. James survived by hiding in a latrine for two weeks. While stories of forgiveness today proliferate across the country, to this day, James refuses to forgive the persons who committed these crimes. And, as he strongly expresses, that decision remains his alone.

It is, however, one which is controversial in modern Rwanda. There is no doubt that one of the central characteristics of the rebuilding of Rwandan society after the 1994 Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi is the often repeated need for forgiveness and reconciliation. Life in Rwanda is punctuated by repeated annual calls to forgive from both government organizations and religious communities. There remains, however, a major disjunct in the understanding of forgiveness between these authoritarian structures and the actual practices of ordinary Rwandans. Authoritarian structures point to the consequences of failing to heal Rwandan society to such an extent that reconciliation (and even forgiveness) is portrayed as a necessary practice, in which Rwandans must engage. On the governmental side, a clear tie exists between success with forgiveness and reconciliation and the international development aid that funds the small nation. On the religious side, reconciliation and forgiveness are portrayed as sacred duties owed because of one’s Christian faith. The stakes could not be higher: development and salvation both rest upon fulfilling the demand to forgive, one usually accompanied by some form of the platitude ‘forgive and forget.’

The practices of ordinary Rwandans Christians, however, continue to resist the perception of forgiveness or reconciliation as demands, instead construing both as gifts freely given, as phenomena which by definition cannot be compelled. I will begin, then, with an examination of first, governmental and second, Christian calls for forgiveness within Rwanda,
and the ways that both present forgiveness as compulsory obligation. Third, I will turn to an analysis of examples of how ordinary Rwandan citizens talk about their own experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation, expressing sentiment that counters both of the previous definitions of the terms. What will emerge is a complicated process whereby forgiveness is understood as gift purely given, unconditionally and beyond compulsion, while simultaneously, forgiveness and reconciliation both would appear to be dependent upon the conditions of the expression of contrition and the request to be forgiven. Finally, in order to more closely understand how forgiveness as gift in the face of the unforgivable functions, I will turn to the post-holocaust discussions of the phenomena found in Jacques Derrida, Vladimir Jankélevitch, and Jean-Luc Marion to see what insight might be gained by bringing these arguments into dialogue with Rwandan discourse and practices. In so doing we will see that Marion’s critique of Derridean gift is one which bears striking resemblance to the practices of individual Rwandans as they speak of their own experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation. The question which guides our inquiry is therefore one placed in the balance between authoritarian structures and individual practice, a definitional question of under what conditions, and in what manner forgiveness might be granted and reconciliation accomplished. And so we ask: can forgiveness be compelled, or must it remain a gift to be freely given?

I. Economic Compulsion

The idea for a national commission to facilitate unity and reconciliation within Rwanda was first imagined in 1993, during the negotiations which transpired in Arusha and which became codified as the pivotal Arusha Peace Accord. In this first formulation, however, the claim that such a commission would be created was little more than a ruse. Juvenal Habyarimana
agreed to create such a commission in an attempt to demonstrate to the outside world his commitment to the peace process, though in reality the claim was primarily a propaganda tool. Even as the agreement was signed, however, Habyarimana’s army had already begun planning the extermination of the Tutsi minority.

Following the genocide of 1994, the necessity of an organization dedicated to healing Rwandan society was inescapably evident, and as a result in a series of laws beginning in 1999 and completed in 2003, a new National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was formed. In close concert with the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (NCLG), NURC today works to facilitate and encourage the reconciliation of all members of Rwandan society. As the primary arm of the government charged with facilitating, maintaining, and ensuring the unity and reconciliation of the nation, it likewise holds the responsibility of developing and implementing official policy. As such the NURC represents the clearest exposition of the official Rwandan governmental position on these topics. It is to the work of this crucial commission that we will first turn.

One of the first priorities of the NURC upon its formal establishment was the development of a National Policy on Unity and Reconciliation. This policy from 2003 defines unity and reconciliation as “conduct and practices of Rwandans that reflect the identity of shared citizenship, culture, equal rights manifested through inter-personal trust, tolerance, respect, equality, truth, and healing wounds.” Emphasis is herein placed upon the creation of a shared Rwandan identity and the reestablishment of the mutual respect needed before any healing can transpire. This policy is in turn dedicated to eight principles actions or ideals:

235 Guide for Design and Implementation of Peace and Reconciliation Initiatives at Grassroots Levels (Kigali, Rwanda, National Commission on Unity and Reconciliation, 2003), 8.
a) To promote Rwandan identity and the interests of Rwandans; b) To fight genocide and its ideology; c) To strive for rule of law and respect of human rights; d) To fight discrimination and exclusion of any kind; e) To have one common purpose of building our country; f) To heal each other's wounds; and to build trust among Rwandans based on remorse, admission of guilt and forgiveness, telling the truth and building a bright future; g) To say with determination “never again” to genocide, [and] h) Self-respect and hard work.

The sixth point (f) is of particular note. The NURC dedicated itself to heal wounds and to build trust, both of which transpire based on a fourfold process necessitating the expression of remorse, the admission of guilt, the forgiveness which NURC sees as flowing from this admission, and truth telling. It is these four attributes which then conspire toward the “building of a bright future.” Even at this early date, forgiveness appears as a foundational principle for the Commission, one which is closely tied to the admission of guilt, and one upon which any new future must rest.

The 2003 report continues to note that the Commission expects every Rwandan individual and civil society organization to be actively involved in the process of unifying and reconciling Rwandans…. NURC expects [that] at grassroots levels, community based organizations and local government entities will develop and implement ideas that will contribute to the realization of a peaceful, united, and prosperous Rwandan society.

Further, it continues to note explicitly that the “reconciliation and unity of Rwandans is the responsibility of every Rwandan.” The aim from the creation of the Commission, therefore, was to involve all persons in the processes of unity and reconciliation, of which forgiveness was considered to be an integral part. The vision was of a unified society where community and local governmental entities work together toward a peaceful future. It is to the final phrase within this exposition, however, that we will find ourselves returning. The actions of the Commission at

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every level of society are designed to create a “peaceful, united, and prosperous” Rwandan society.” The tie between reconciliation and financial prosperity is thus present from the onset.

By 2006, NURC had created, with the assistance of the European Union, a Training Manual on Conflict Management. Noting conflict as a systemic – though not necessarily destructive – reality of life, the Training Manual speaks of reconciliation as the bringing close together again of those torn apart by massacre or war with the express aim of the reconstruction of the community. In line with the 2003 report, the Training Manual again seeks to define reconciliation. It states,

> The process of reconciliation has many components namely telling the truth about what happened, repentance, asking for pardon and being forgiven, being charged of and paying reparation. There may later be pursuits in justice, moral rehabilitation and counseling, compensation for damages, etc.; all these steps lead to people living again together in harmony.

Again forgiveness is seen as an integral part of the reconciliation process, one which the report frames as a fourfold process beginning with one’s own conscience, then proceeding to reconciliation with God, neighbor, and finally nature itself. Reconciliation is only possible when security exists such that persons may speak the truth with confidence. Justice itself is that which allows people again to feel “respected as human beings” because the security demonstrated through justice allows the full truth of the events which have transpired to come to light. A clear tie is made herein between truth and justice and “the likelihood for national reconciliation among Rwandans.” Further, NURC states clearly that this is the underlying aim of the local Gacaca trials which were then transpiring, that through truth telling and the

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239 Emphasis added.
242 *Training Manual*, 40. Nature is herein described as “environment.”
244 *Training Manual*, 42.
establishment of justice (which, as we saw in Part I, were the intended hallmarks of the Gacaca courts), Gacaca would ultimately help to facilitate “unity and reconciliation” among all Rwandans.

By 2009, as a result of the ongoing work of the Commission, it had become necessary to reexamine NURC’s mission. The summary report of the same year describes this as follows:

The overall mission is to promote unity and reconciliation among all Rwandans through constant dialogue on matters related to peace, unity, and reconciliation, education and sensitization using all means possible and facilitating and empowering interpersonal, community, and national reconciliation efforts. To ensure effective coordination, NURC has engaged Rwandans into a participatory consultative process to come up with a National unity and reconciliation policy whose core values include promotion of national unity based on Rwandanness, healing historical wounds through truth searching, acknowledgment and memory of genocide, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.

While not deviating substantively from the 2003 or 2006 statements, the report herein makes clear a tenet which had existed from its very beginning, namely that the process of reconciliation in Rwanda is one which must be participatory. The report poses rhetorically the question: “How does one reconcile with a killer of his family and why not justice first and reconciliation later?” and responds that the answer is clearly to “make reconciliation work community based and owned.” When all persons are woven into the process, the potential for success would seem to increase. This, most plainly, is the opinion advanced by the government.

With the aim of participatory involvement, the report proceeds to outline four critical programs which have been undertaken by the Commission since its inception. First among these was the flagship *Ingando* project, which brought students of differing background together for discussion, knowledge, and learning. Aimed at helping to create a new Rwandan identity, these residential camps have since served tens of thousands of persons, primarily students about to

246 *Training Manual*, 47.
247 *Reconciliation Work*, 4.
248 *Reconciliation Work*, 5.
249 *Reconciliation Work*, 20.
commence their university education. In a remarkable experiment, in 2011 alone nearly 40,000 students participated in the three-week intensive experience. Second, NURC has worked to train Abakangurambaga, reconciliation volunteers “working to foster interpersonal and community reconciliation including reconciliation between victims of genocide and the perpetrators.” Third, NURC has promoted Ubusabane, inter-community exchanges, including a special Ubusabane working at “bringing together released perpetrators with the rest of the Community.” Fourth, NURC reinvented the Itorero ry'Igihugu, the traditional form of Rwandan education, now formulated to “promote values of unity, truth, [and a] culture of hard work [while]… avoiding attitudes and mindsets that deter development.” By 2009, the Itorero schools had hosted more than 25,000 grassroots leaders and in excess of 43,000 primary and secondary school teachers. Each of these programs sought “to enhance community trust, reconciliation and [also combat] discrimination and genocide ideology.” Finally, consistent with its policy to increase successes in reconciliation through fostering a sense of ownership in local projects by individual citizens, NURC has worked to provide community support to local reconciliation initiatives. The largest part of these local initiatives have sought to bring together confessed perpetrators and survivors in common work projects aimed toward “promoting reconciliation in communities [and] income generating activities.”

NURC claims explicitly that the growth of such activities is proof that “reconciliation is taking place at the community level.” The report continues to note that as a result of its efforts,

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251 Reconciliation Work, 11.
252 Reconciliation Work, 11.
254 Reconciliation Work, 15.
255 Reconciliation Work, 15.
emerging stories of forgiveness and confession and are being used as a strategy to spread reconciliation message through exchange visits and sharing of testimonies…. Such success stories of reconciliation are putting Rwanda as a global leader in reconciliation and peace building.256

In describing the impact of its work NURC claims:

Today Rwandans are reconciling and living peacefully. Survivors are courageously coming to terms with the past and some have started joint initiatives with families of victims and released perpetrators and stories of forgiveness and confession are emerging countrywide.257

It is certainly true that NURC has accomplished remarkable success in a very limited amount of time. Rwanda’s status as the safest country on the continent, with some of the lowest tolerance for corruption of any country in the world, owes a significant debt to the work of the NURC. And yet, there is likewise something uneasy simmering in these documents. As was the case in the 2003 report, the connection between reconciliation and financial success is again strongly stated in the 2009 report, where NURC notes that the reconciliation projects themselves are often directed toward income generation. Repeatedly we find the assertion that reconciliation will lead to financial prosperity. Perhaps nowhere is this stated more clearly than when the report speaks of Vision2020, Rwanda’s long-term economic development plan, to which the “promotion of unity and reconciliation” is described as a “cornerstone.”258 Reconciliation and forgiveness are described as the foundational principles upon which any future must be built. Additionally, the report makes it clear that participation by all is required. NURC claims to monitor “whether all institutions and Rwandans abide by unity and reconciliation principles.”259 This combination of attributes of required participation and monitoring to ensure participation leaves open the question of the place in Rwandan society for those who do not choose to reconcile or forgive, indeed it leaves open even the question of whether one retains this right in the first place.

256 Reconciliation Work, 15.
257 Reconciliation Work, 21.
258 Reconciliation Work, 21.
259 Reconciliation Work, 21.
Given the high claims of success present in the 2009 report, including the “successful reintegration” of over 70,000 released perpetrators of genocide,\(^{260}\) it is perhaps no surprise that the pamphlet from 2010 describing the activities of the Commission is entitled “Reconciled Let’s Build Rwanda.” “Reconciled.” Not a mere quirk of language, as the same phrase now appears on the folder covers used for formal NURC events; the choice is deliberate. As of 2010, NURC is comfortable making the bold claim that Rwanda is “reconciled.” The move here is away from the process of reconciliation, and toward questions of what to do next, questions which center, inevitably, upon economic development.

The survey report evaluating NURC’s activities from the same year presents a similar story. Simplifying earlier expositions of its policy, the *Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer* claims that this reconciliation consists of a five-fold process of truth, punishment, compensation, forgiveness, and individual healing.\(^{261}\) Nearly 90% of persons interviewed in the report either agree or strongly agree with the statement “I have forgiven those who hurt others in the past.” Likewise slightly more than 90% of persons interviewed noted that “those who did wrong in the past have sought forgiveness.”\(^{262}\) In each case there were no significant gendered differences in respondent’s answers. At the same time, however, more than a third (34.5%) of respondents agreed that “engaging in reconciliation process is not a voluntary commitment.”\(^{263}\)

On one level, of course, this represents something of a truism. Survivors did not choose to become survivors any more than they chose the systemic post-genocide reality in which they found themselves living in close proximity to those who committed acts of unspeakable horror.

\(^{260}\) *Reconciliation Work*, 22.

\(^{261}\) *Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer* (Kigali, Rwanda: National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, October 2010), 29.

\(^{262}\) *Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer*, pp57.

\(^{263}\) *Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer*, pp82.
The options for such persons are thus limited: live next-door to one another in silence or attempt reconciliation. And yet, there would appear to be something a bit deeper at work at this juncture as well. From the beginning a clear tie was expressed between the need to reconcile, of which forgiveness is understood as a component, and the economic prosperity of the country. To no small degree development depends upon at least the perception of a successful process of reconciliation. The more that foreign – predominantly Western – powers view Rwanda as a “success story,” the more aid and foreign investment flows into the country. This is a process that spirals as well creating a positive feedback loop. Particularly as Rwanda seeks to move away from an economy dependent on foreign aid, this private investment is critical.

The stakes are therefore quite high, and the demand placed upon entities like NURC and NCLG is correlative and great. In turn both organizations create programs to facilitate reconciliation and forgiveness that discuss the terms in ways that border on compulsory language. From the perspective of the government, it would seem, reconciliation is not an option. All persons must engage in the process, and the process must succeed. Perhaps nowhere is this more clear than in the highly publicized and ubiquitous *Vision2020*, the development blueprint for the nation that guides vast areas of governance and economic policy. Itself presenting admirable and lofty goals, *Vision2020* states the reconciliation question plainly. “Without successful reconciliation, political stability and security, private investors will not develop confidence in the country.”

Development, the alleviation of poverty, the transformation of Rwanda into a middle-class society: all depend upon “successful reconciliation.” In such a situation, it initially appears to be a legitimate question to ask: how could one choose otherwise? How could one choose not to reconcile? Not to forgive? The risks in such questions are,  

however, equally great. Can there be a place in Rwandan society, in the bright future imagined by Vision2020, for those individuals who choose not to reconcile, and who choose not to forgive? Whether reconciliation or forgiveness can or ought to be compelled, therefore, is a question which for the moment remains open.

II. Theological Compulsion

The tendency to construe forgiveness and reconciliation as compulsory duties is, however, a tendency far from unique to the Rwandan government alone. While the Rwandan government tends toward compulsory language for largely pragmatic economic reasons, within many Christian organizations in Rwanda, similarly compulsory language appears with a theological imperative that raises the stakes even higher. No longer are forgiveness and reconciliation merely the basis for development, but within religious discourse, they become a foundational requirement for religious identity, and even salvation itself.

Perhaps the strongest and most prominent Christian voice in Rwandan concerning forgiveness and reconciliation is that of Bishop John Rucyahana. An Anglican Bishop, Rucyahana has been responsible for spearheading a wide array of projects ranging from the famous Sonrise school for orphaned children, to work with prisoners, confessed criminals and survivors. He currently serves as the head of Prison Fellowship Rwanda as well as on the global executive board of Prison Fellowship International. In addition, Rucyahana is the leader of a coalition of fourteen different Christian organizations in Rwanda that works together to support forgiveness and reconciliation efforts. Rucyahana’s voice is likewise one which has a great deal of influence on the national governmental stage as well, though this is not surprising given that as Rwanda is an almost entirely Christian nation, Christian beliefs are often simply assumed as
truths by those in government. In this vein, Rucyahana serves as the head of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. His influence in Rwanda in terms of helping to set the national Christian discourses, and strongly influencing the national political discourses, cannot be overstated.

One of the central themes found in John Rucyahana’s writings and speeches is the idea that forgiveness represents a sacred Christian duty which is central to both one’s Christian identity and to one’s salvation. In the discussion of his work with prisoners, Bishop John Rucyahana relates a phone call he once received from a group of young soldiers. Somewhat incredulously, the young men asked him,

Bishop John, it looks as though your program is about helping these criminals, these killers, these evil men who hacked a million people to death. Not only are you trying to get them set free, but you are working to bless them with salvation and intending to take them to heaven before the victims.  

The Bishop’s response was telling,

That is true. We want them to repent, ask forgiveness, and reconcile to their victims. And then they will be able to not only go to heaven, but to have peace here before they die.

At this juncture, the demand that one seek forgiveness is presented as a Christian obligation upon which salvation depends.

Rucyahana, however, takes this even further, claiming that reconciliation itself is not an option, but a necessity that flows from one’s Christian faith. Rucyahana again writes:

There is a good song that says: ‘The crowns are prepared for everybody who will reach heaven.’ But you won’t get to have such a crown if you still hate your neighbor. No Abahutu will get that crown when he or she hates Abatutsi. No Abatutsi will get that divine crown if he or she hates Abahutu. It is not easy to let go of hatred, but it is worth it for that crown.

266 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 168.
267 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 170.
The message is clear; there is no salvation without reconciliation. In this passage one finds the persistent theme that reconciliatory actions are actions undertaken for the promise of a future reward. And yet, Rucyahana does not stop here. For Rucyahana, one cannot even live life successfully without having forgiven. He expresses this unambiguously as he writes “those who don’t forgive are dying.”268 This applies in his thought to both perpetrators and to victims. Indeed, to even become a part of the prison reconciliation program he runs, one is required to first confess and ask for forgiveness.269 The framing of this is more than a little disturbing. The ultimate model of do ut des, one forgives so one can receive something, a better life, a future reward. As was the case in governmental discourses, forgiveness and reconciliation are understood as transactional events.

Rucyahana likewise explicitly and directly rejects the requirement, found in governmental discourse and in actual practice, of confession and the expression of contrition. While he notes that survivors do indeed want perpetrators to express remorse for what they have done, and while he himself seeks to facilitate this, Rucyahana is careful to note that what he calls “true biblical forgiveness” is not dependent upon either the request to be forgiven or the expression of remorse.270 Rucyahana explains this concept further through an analogy to the story of the crucifixion of Jesus where he writes,

Remember, Jesus did not wait until He was off the cross. He was still in pain when He forgave. The nails were still in His hands. And the crown of thorns was still on His head. They were still mocking him underneath the cross. And He cried to the Father, saying, “Father, forgive them.”271

The analogy to the story is meant to convey the notion that forgiveness is such a crucial Christian duty that one need not wait until one is asked to forgive. Forgiveness is required of persons as a

268 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 192.
269 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 179.
270 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 185.
271 Rucyahana and Riordan, Bishop, 190.
direct result of the forgiveness freely given by the figure of Jesus. Somewhat paradoxically then, a demand is herein created to model a practice originally understood as pure gift, as grace freely given. And for Rucyahana, as we have seen, the stakes are absolute.

Rucyahana’s sentiment is one now commonly found in explicitly Christian discourses in Rwanda. In her work After Genocide – there is hope, Mary Weeks relates the story of how a survivor, Stephen, himself a Christian minister, came to terms with understanding forgiveness. The discussion centers upon what Pastor Stephen had described as the “challenge of the Beatitudes.” The challenge as described is that “Believers are to be the salt and light in their society.” Taking a strict interpretation of this in concert with Rucyahana, Pastor Stephen explains, “You cannot be salt and light if you harbor bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart.” To be the Christian that one ought to be, according to Pastor Stephen, one must forgive. To do otherwise, according to such rationale, would make it simply impossible to uphold one’s duties as a Christian.

The same sentiment can be found in the discourse of Christian ministers across Rwanda. A Presbyterian minister recounts the story of reconciliation within her church. Early efforts in the years immediately following the genocide focused upon efforts to bring people together through reconciliation and material support to combat poverty as they likewise sought to reintegrate persons into a new peaceful life together. For several years, the church ran teachings sessions and small group activities, both facilitated by pastors and specialists in peace and conflict resolution, which were self-reported to be quite successful. The theme of forgiveness and reconciliation as religious requirement, however, was present throughout. Asked to preach during the commemoration period (where, importantly even the topic of sermons is dictated by

272 Mary Weeks Millard, After Genocide – there is hope (Bristol, UK: Terra Nova, 2007), 141.
the official theme of the annual commemoration) she describes making analogy to the story of Jesus forgiving criminals during the crucifixion in her sermon. The story, for her, is one of redemption both for the criminals and for the figure of Jesus. Through forgiveness, she claims, Jesus’s own life is restored, and hope is ensured for the criminals. Speaking of Jesus she says, “there is a promise that whoever follows his way will be like him.” She continues, “There’s no loss in forgiving… There are many benefits… if people don’t forgive each other… their work is a loss.” She explicitly ties this to development, which she sees as impossible without forgiveness. Again we see a tie between forgiveness and material gain at work here. But the crux of the argument comes in her final claim as she says, “You can’t call yourself a Christian if you don’t forgive your enemy, if you don’t love unconditionally.”273 Another minister makes the same claim, in a sermon from 2006, “God… demands of us to love one another as he loved us and to forgive each other as he himself forgives us daily.”274

As we have seen in this overview, forgiveness within most Christian organizations in Rwanda is dominated by the language of compulsion. Christianity alternately “demands,” “expects,” or “requires” forgiveness, even as the predominant story used in these discussions – that of the story of the crucifixion of the figure of Jesus – is one of a forgiveness freely given as unconditional gift. One’s very identity as Christian is construed as dependent upon the capacity and willingness to forgive even the most horrific of actions. But perhaps most strikingly, what we see in these discourses is the fact that even one’s salvation, the fate of one’s eternal soul, depends on how one acts in the face of this compulsory requirement.

273 Personal interview, April 27, 2011.
III. Forgiveness Freely Given

Individuals in Rwanda thus find themselves placed between two competing compulsory discourses. As they are integral to the rebuilding process, forgiveness and reconciliation, according to the government, are activities in which all Rwandans must engage. As a duty central to one’s ability to identify as Christian, according to many Christian authorities, forgiveness and reconciliation are religious obligations placed upon every Christian, with the penalty of mortal peril should one refuse. And yet, neither compulsory discourse serves as a sufficient representation of the actual experiences of Rwandans as they themselves engage in the work of reconciliation and forgiveness. Though often clothed in the language inherited either from the secular powers of governmental persuasion or from the sacred powers of theological coercion, Rwandans continue to demonstrate through word and action an understanding of forgiveness as a gift which is the sole power of an individual to bestow upon another. This is a gift that cannot be compelled and cannot be taken, but represents a radical givenness itself. And as we will see as we now turn to Rwandan testimony, as gift forgiveness too depends profoundly not upon any compulsion, but upon a correlatively free act, that of the expression of contrition on the part of the perpetrator.

Evidence of a Rwandan understanding of forgiveness as gift, and of the dependency of forgiveness and reconciliation, both proliferate across the testimony of Rwandan survivors. In his own testimony, Emmanuel Gasana of Kibungo states this plainly: reconciliation “cannot be an obligation.”275 As “something that comes from the heart,” it must be freely given, even as Emmanuel calls for government and teachers to promote reconciliation however possible.276

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276 Whitworth, We Survived, 40.
Yves Kamuronsi of Kicuciro notes this clearly as well when expressing his concerns over his capacity to forgive. Whether or not he will ever gain this capacity remains in question for him, and yet, there is zero question that the forgiveness is his and his alone to grant. This is echoed again in the words of Jeanette Nibagwire of Bicombi, whose uncle murdered his own nieces and nephews. Jeanette herself cannot forgive, and doubts that she will ever be able to reconcile with such persons, and yet fiercely defends that forgiveness would be her right and her choice. While she notes the importance of mutual recognition in the process of reconciliation, any future possibilities remain unknown for her. For Marcel Ruhurambugo of Mikingi, the situation is similar, though he holds hope that while reconciliation may be impossible for him, it may become possible for the next generation.

Again resisting any kind of compulsion, Odette Umulisa of Mabanzw states the matter quite clearly: “We have to live together in order to build the country, but you can’t tell me to be reconciled with them. That’s asking the impossible!” Jean de Dieu Uwamungu expresses the same sentiment as he speaks of his experiences attending a vocational training program organized by Fonds d’Assistance aux Rescapé du Génocide (FARG), an organization dedicated to providing assistance for survivors. He notes that during the training there was a lecture on reconciliation, which he refused to attend for fear of it inducing a “trauma attack.” “Rejecting” the lecture with several other students, Jean de Dieu’s experience ultimately resulted in the discontinuation of the lecture as a part of the vocational training program. His strong objection

277 Whitworth, We Survived, 56-57.
278 Whitworth, We Survived, 135.
279 Whitworth, We Survived, 183.
280 Whitworth, We Survived, 229.
281 Whitworth, We Survived, 241.
was the result of his experience of feeling as if he was being compelled to forgive. As with others, forgiveness was his to give.

This same sentiment is again found in Catherine Claire Larson’s *As We Forgive*, where she relates the story of Joy, a student at the Sonrise school for orphans of the genocide founded by Anglican Bishop John Rucyahana. As she relates the story of Joy’s life, at a crucial moment, Joy reveals her deepest thoughts on forgiveness. Joy says, “Forgiveness is a gift one gives to change the heart of the offender.”

For her, following the recognition that transpires in forgiveness, a person is fundamentally changed, as they are once again regarded as fully human. At once, Joy reveals in this poignant phrase both the status of forgiveness as a gift and simultaneously the idea that this is a gift given with purpose. Through an act of recognition, this action is also revolutionary, for through the choice to see one another as human once again, pardon thus demonstrates that as a gift, it has the power to re-establish relationship, and thereby the possibility of community anew.

In her autobiographical account of the genocide, Frida Gashumba as well writes at length of her experiences with forgiveness. Rejecting the persistent demands she initially encountered from Ugandan and Western preachers, she asks defiantly, “What right did they have to lecture me on the subject?” It is only after lengthy struggle that Frida finds herself residing in a kind of solidarity with the figure of Jesus. Describing him as the one who forgave freely without any expectation of return, she describes a resonance between her own experience of forgiveness and the one she imagines having taken place in the figure of Jesus. Though resorting to inherited Christian language, wherein she believes that she either must forgive or cease identifying as

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Catherine Claire Lawson, *As We Forgive: Stories of Reconciliation from Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 87.


Gashumba, *Frida*, 118-120.
Christian, Frida nonetheless goes on to note how crucial it is that the forgiveness given by her – one which she sees parallel to the forgiveness offered by the figure of Jesus – must be given completely freely, without expectation of any return. It must be, as she sees it in the story of Jesus, an act of pure givenness, or in more theologically Christian language, an act of grace.

Forgiveness and reconciliation as they appear in Rwandan testimonies also bear a second dimension which likewise must be understood as freely expressed, that of the need for perpetrators to seek forgiveness or to ask for reconciliation. The presence of this concept among survivors is so present as to be nearly ubiquitous. Athanase Bugirimfura of Kamegeri notes “if someone has wronged you, he has to come to you and apologize.” Unity or reconciliation can only become possible with apology. This is because Athanase understands that apology itself to be the first step in opening dialogue. Pierre Kavubi likewise asserts that one must admit wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness. Pierre draws a clear line between the bare openness of this request and politics, which he thinks can never lead to reconciliation. The key here is that this request and any forgiveness granted must both occur freely, not as a result of a process of political negotiation.

Tharcisse Mukama of Ruhengeri makes the same claim, that granting forgiveness depends upon the perpetrator asking to be forgiven, a request she sees in its humbleness as demonstration of the fact that the perpetrator has renounced the actions and will not repeat such actions. Offering an important observation, Speciose Mukamusoni wants to ensure that such requests are directed to victims, not merely to the government in the process of the Gacaca

285 Whitworth, We Survived, 31.. 286 Whitworth, We Survived, 70. 287 Whitworth, We Survived, 88.
This same constellation of ideas shows up consistently throughout the testimonies. Freddy Mutanguha of Kibuye notes “I think it’s better for those who committed the crimes to start asking for forgiveness…. They should show us that they are truly sorry. Then things could proceed.” This demand for remorse is echoed by Claver Nkezabera of Sovu, that “reconciliation would be meaningless if they freed people who had never been pardoned or asked for forgiveness.” And for Oliver Ruyenzi of Kicukiro, the act of a killer asking for forgiveness is so crucial that he describes it as itself an act of humanity, an act restoring humanity when all faith in humankind had been shredded.

Even among persons who have not forgiven, the requirement that the one who has done wrong must seek forgiveness and request it remains central. For Anastase Twagirashima of Gikongoro, reconciliation could be possible only if there was full truth telling by those who were guilty and if justice is done. Further, in his own experience he notes that as no one has asked him for forgiveness, he has not forgiven. While Alice Uwimpuhe of Tambwe claims that she feels confident she could forgive if asked by someone expressing true contrition to forgive crimes committed against her, such a request has never been made. As such, again, in the absence of the request, there can be no forgiveness.

Across these testimonies therefore, we see a consistent understanding of forgiveness as a gift that cannot be compelled, but must be given freely. Further, in individual experience both forgiveness and reconciliation are dependent upon the fact that they must also be requested freely. There is therefore found within the phenomenon of forgiveness a doubled freedom, that of

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288 Whitworth, *We Survived*, 98.
289 Whitworth, *We Survived*, 163.
290 Whitworth, *We Survived*, 193.
292 Whitworth, *We Survived*, 270.
the request and that of the gift, and both would appear to be dependent upon a true expression of remorse by the perpetrator. How can it be, however, that practice would appear to differ so dramatically from the discourses coming from the two most prominent and dominant influences in the country, from governmental and religious organizations? In order to answer this question, let us now turn to a fuller examination of the phenomena of forgiveness, one which will bring us back once again to another post-genocide context.

**IV. Impossible Forgiveness, the Gift, and Givenness**

Given the persistence with which forgiveness is described as gift in Rwandan contexts, what precisely might be intended by such a gift, or by its givenness, is worthy of further exploration. To that end, let us now turn to a parallel discussion of forgiveness and its enabling concept, the gift. We will therefore turn first to the notion of the gift in the writings of Jacques Derrida, and then to the debates between Derrida and Jankélevitch concerning the nature of forgiveness, itself a permutation of the idea of the gift. In each case, it is the requirement of conditions to which Derrida most strongly objects. The question in the Rwandan case, however, is one of how givenness can transpire in a situation that does allow for certain necessitating conditions. To this end, we will conclude with an examination of the important critique offered by Jean-Luc Marion of Derridean gift, a critique which serves to refigure the gift in terms of givenness itself. As we shall see, as givenness, it is possible both to preserve the radical nature of the gift and simultaneously allow conditions to exist (such as the expression of remorse or the request for forgiveness) without nullifying the givenness of the gift itself.

The gift, a concept frequently placed under critical inquiry in postmodern philosophy, finds its contemporary exposition in the work of Jacques Derrida, most notably in Derrida’s
Given Time. In Given Time, Derrida outlines what he sees as the essential paradox as the gift. Derrida notes that for the gift to be a gift, it must “defy reciprocity or symmetry” for when the gift is predicated upon reciprocity or symmetry it ceases to properly hold status as gift and instead is reduced to a moment in a system of economic exchange. And it is this very system of economic exchange which the gift is supposed to evade.

Derrida outlines four characteristics of the conditions of possibility of the gift. First, Derrida claims that in the gift there must be a radical lack of reciprocity, that there can be no return given to the giver by the recipient for at the very moment a return could ensue, the gift would cease to be a gift. Thus for Derrida, were the gift to be possible, it would have to lie fully beyond reciprocity. Second, Derrida claims that the recipient of the gift must not recognize the gift as such, that the recipient cannot know that the gift has been given lest a system of economic debt and exchange be established. Third, Derrida argues that the giver must forget the gift has been given lest the gift fall into economic exchange as a result of the potential of self-congratulation wherein the ‘real benefit’ would rest in benefit to the self thus annulling the givenness of the gift. Fourth and finally, Derrida argues that even the gift itself cannot appear as a gift lest it fall into economic exchange. Thus what is created is a situation wherein neither the recipient nor the giver may recognize the gift as gift (which for Derrida would imply economic exchange). It is because of the requirements of this precarious situation that Derrida claims that the gift is not merely impossible, but represents “the impossible” itself. And thus within Derrida, forgiveness, which is itself a linguistic permutation of the gift, therefore likewise exists within this struggle between possibility and impossibility.

Derrida, Given Time, 7.
Derrida, Given Time, 7.
Derrida structures much of the discussion on forgiveness in *On Forgiveness and Cosmopolitanism* around a response to Vladimir Jankélévitch’s presentations of the limits of forgiveness. Seeking to erase precisely these limits, or perhaps better, seeking to glorify them as the very enabling condition of forgiveness, Derrida seeks to demonstrate that forgiveness is an aneconomic, apolitical, intensely personal encounter that occurs face to face. Forgiveness, then, exists within an impossible proximity between persons wherein as pure gift the victim forgives the unforgivable crimes of the perpetrator. It is, thus, impossibility doubled.

Much of Derrida’s discussion of forgiveness centers around its aneconomic and apolitical nature. It is precisely for this reason that Derrida joins in Jankélévitch’s protest of the political usurpations of the language of forgiveness in the wake of the Second World War, though he takes the discussion in a rather different direction. Though in his 1967 work *Forgiveness*, Jankélévitch expressly and repeatedly states that there is no such thing as the unforgivable, his tone had changed by the time he published in 1971 *L’Imprescriptible*. In Jankélévitch’s “Should we forgive them?,” published originally as the aforementioned *L’Imprescriptible*, he argues vehemently (and at times quite violently) against the implied forgiveness that would result from a statute of limitations on crimes against humanity. The terms of this discussion for

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297 While the cause for Jankélévitch’s anger is easily understood and justified, his callous disregard for other forms of suffering, and his rampant racism is not. Jankélévitch repeatedly exhibits a violence one would not expect given the topic of his discussion, a violence which is unwarranted and inappropriate. He refers to a colleague’s “babble about the bombing of Dresden” (an incinerating execution wherein fires reached 1500° C murdering tens of thousands of civilians) (564), makes unwarranted (not to mention wholly unfair) racist claims against the people of Poland (who suffered losses nearly as great numerically as those suffered by the Jewish population, as victims of rather similar rhetoric) (570), makes an unpardoning and sweeping alignment of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Nazism (which even in its strongest formulations is not as clear as Jankélévitch claims) (568), and finally makes the audacious suggestion that the existence of a German moral philosopher is near impossible (568). Jankélévitch is unambiguous in his disdain for everything German, as evidenced by his refusal even to set foot in the country (570) and his comparison of the German people to dogs, a comparison he considers unfair to dogs (565). Whatever might be said of the value of anger and passion in rhetoric, it must not go unchecked when it turns to blatant racism and linguistic violence. Jankélévitch is guilty of precisely such appalling, some might say even unforgivable, behavior.
Jankélévitch are the events of the Second World War, specifically the Shoah, which Jankélévitch describes as the “most monstrous crime in history,” comparable to nothing, singular in nature, of a wholly different kind, and, simply, unique in history. He then seeks to imply that due to the singular nature of this crime, forgiveness would represent but a further crime as it would involve a determined forgetting of the horrific nature of the original.

This is not however, due exclusively to the fact that the crimes under discussion are monstrous, or even singularly unique in nature. It is rather, a point upon which Derrida will seize, a question of proper jurisdiction. In the face of such horrors as occurred in the Shoah, it is inappropriate, even “a sinister joke,” for the state to presume to speak on behalf of the victims, to issue a forgiveness that could only be given by the victims themselves, a gift clearly now made impossible through the death of the victims. To this extent, forgiveness for such a crime as the Shoah becomes as unforgivable as the crime itself.

It is at this point that Derrida enters into dialogue with Jankélévitch. From the onset Derrida is determine that forgiveness maintains a radical distance from what might be understand as reparation, justice, or reconciliation. For Derrida, any true forgiveness must exhibit a radical purity, a precisely impossible purity. He writes,

300 Jankélévitch, “Should we,” 563.
301 Jankélévitch, “Should we,” 564.
304 While the monstrosity of the crimes under discussion are certainly not debatable, the unique nature of the crimes as described by Jankélévitch is worthy of further examination. Given the conditions of this unique nature as put forth by Jankélévitch, as preventing dialogue (Jankélévitch, “Should we,” 560), an “inextinguishable work of hatred” (561), “directed, methodical, and selective” (563), occurring with significant advance warning, knowledge, and ideology (564), and as an event “unique in history and doubtless will never happen again” (572), we are afforded the unfortunate benefit of a damning vantage point, a world both post-Shoah and post-Rwanda which Jankélévitch could only have imagined in his worst nightmares.
305 Jankélévitch, “Should we,” 567.
Forgiveness is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible, as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.\textsuperscript{306}

For is this not exactly what has occurred, and on this point we can agree that both Derrida and Jankélévitch are in accord, in the case of the Shoah? An event arrived which was exceptional, extraordinary, and anti-normative, one which “in the face of the impossible…interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.” What else, then, but a similar event could possibly serve as an appropriate response to such monstrous and horrific events?

As much as the extreme purity of this forgiveness does seem an adequate response to the opposing extreme of such events as genocide, thus suggesting that it is precisely such an extreme event as forgiveness which could only justly reply to the opposing extreme of crimes the caliber of genocide, it is critical to note that Derrida is not herein reserving the term solely for use in such situations. Forgiveness, in every case where it might properly be termed forgiveness, can only occur – by its very definition – in the radical pure form demonstrated by reference to, and analogy of, the extreme nature of an event such as the Shoah. If, as Derrida once claimed in an interview in South Africa, we are to understand his philosophy as the effort to “draw a very rigorous border”\textsuperscript{307} around the concept of forgiveness, as the effort of a “philosopher who tries to be very rigorous with what’s said and tries to understand the meaning of words,”\textsuperscript{308} this emphasis upon purity should come as no surprise. This statement represents Derrida’s methodology expertly. Forgiveness, pardon, is in its very linguistic construction tied intimately to the gift, a concept that Derrida has argued can only appear (if it indeed ever appears) in a form of radical purity. Pardon – \textit{par} (by, through) and \textit{don} (gift) – is that which arrives by gift and also as a

\textsuperscript{306} Derrida, \textit{Cosmopolitanism}, 32.
\textsuperscript{307} Jacques Derrida, Interview in South Africa, available online with the title “Derrida on Forgiveness,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDrU1jtt_fI.
\textsuperscript{308} Derrida, Interview.
result bears the inscription of the same radical purity. Thus while the discussions centers largely around the nature of the unforgivable crime, it is important to bear in mind that this must be viewed as a helpful rhetorical tool in explaining the true depths of the aporia Derrida is seeking to probe, not an attempt to isolate pardon to instances of the truly horrific.

Forgiveness must remain, therefore, in any context, fully impossible, as it must remain fully above any calculation or political agenda. In “To Forgive: The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptable” Derrida writes that there can be “no forgiveness without gift” though “the two are… not the same thing.” Forgiveness, pardon, is therefore that which arrives by gift, by the seeming impossibility of the pure gift, fully independent from any economic interest in the part of the given. The analogy to gift serves an important function here, as it elucidates the extreme degree to which Derrida means this relationship to be fully aneconomic. As radical as the gift appears in its pure impossibility of arrival and in its being given, so too is the radicality of the impossibility in which forgiveness resides. This is not merely ideal, it is necessary, for anything but this exceptional form of forgiveness would descend into economic haggling.

Responding to Jankélévitch from the vantage point of this pure forgiveness, Derrida is therefore able to claim that it is precisely the Shoah, and events like it, which are perhaps the only things worthy of forgiveness. Thus it is precisely the unforgivable crime which is worthy of such a gesture as forgiveness. In On Forgiveness, Derrida writes,

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310 Derrida makes a careful step in this discussion to include alongside the Shoah also “all the inexpiable monstrosities of this century.” Richard Kearney, moderator, “On Forgiveness: A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida,” in Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon, Questioning, 55.
‘ Forgiveness died in the death camps,’ he [Jankélévitch] says. Yes. Unless it only becomes possible from the moment that it appears impossible. Its history would begin, on the contrary, with the unforgivable.\textsuperscript{311}

In a roundtable discussion moderated by Richard Kearney, Derrida responds similarly to this very point by saying,

Jankélévitch says that forgiveness has come to an end, has died in the death camps…. It is exactly the opposite. It is because forgiveness seems to be impossible that forgiveness finds a starting point.\textsuperscript{312}

This condition of origin as being contained within the impossible forgiveness of the unforgivable therefore lies at the heart of Derrida’s discussion. He demonstrates this repeatedly, claiming “forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable”\textsuperscript{313} and that “forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible.”\textsuperscript{314} The abiding point in the argument is that forgiveness can only properly be attributed to the exceptional, for in all other instances justice or reparations are sufficient. It is at the limit where words fall silent, justice is rendered impotent, and reparations become an offensive gesture, the limit of the intelligible and the imaginable, that forgiveness resides. And it resides here, as Derrida has claimed, by its very linguistic definition.

This remarkable limit is truly the limit of the intelligible, and indeed of philosophy itself. Derrida claims that “when an impossible something happens, or becomes possible as impossible, then the economy of philosophy becomes unavailable.” Indeed presence itself becomes unavailable, and at that point “forgiveness exceeds presence.”\textsuperscript{315} While it may properly amount to a form of madness, a term which Derrida uses in the discussion frequently, it is exactly this

\begin{itemize}
\item[311] Derrida, Cosmopolitanism, 37.
\item[312] Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon, Questioning, 55.
\item[313] Derrida, Cosmopolitanism, 32.
\item[314] Derrida, Cosmopolitanism, 33.
\item[315] Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon, Questioning, 53.
\end{itemize}
madness that Derrida has sought to probe, and will continue to probe in his efforts to illuminate
the darkness where one finds forgiveness, where it is, perhaps, “the only thing that arrives.”

Thus as fully aneconomic and apolitical, forgiveness appears in intensely personal, face-
to-face encounters between individual persons. It is noteworthy, in this encounter, that while
forgiveness occurs in the intimacy of the face-to-face encounter, it is only the victim whose
motivations are truly of concern. To this end, Derrida objects strongly to Jankélévitch’s
argument that in order to be forgiven one must both seek forgiveness and admit guilt without
condition. This is particularly problematic in reference to the discussion of pardon as gift,
because for Derrida, this prohibits true gift by the advent of the introduction of economy. In one
of the most direct discussions of this point, Jankélévitch writes:

But who ever asked us for a pardon? ... When the guilty are fat, well nourished, prosperous,
enriched by the ‘economic miracle,’ a pardon is a sinister joke. No, a pardon is not suitable for
swine and their sows. Pardoning died in the death camps. Our horror over that which properly
speaking reason cannot conceive would smother pity at its birth. If only the accused could have
shown us pity. The accused cannot have it all ways – cannot reproach the victims for their own
patriotism and good intentions, and presume to be pardoned. One must choose! To presume to be
pardoned one must admit to being guilty, without conditions or alleging extenuating
circumstances.

Such an approach, wherein conditions enter into discussion, would seem to immediately reduce
forgiveness to economic transactions of the kind seen in reconciliation and judgment. In a
moment of true forgiveness, for Derrida, both the request to be forgiven and the contrition of the
criminal are irrelevant, an argument we have seen before (albeit in different form) from
Rucyahana. What must, and can only, arrive as pure forgiveness is the “aneconomic forgiveness
granted to the guilty as guilty, without counterpart, even to those who do not repent or ask

317 Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism*, 42.
318 Jankélévitch, “Should we,” 567.
319 Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism*, 41.
320 Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism*, 43.
The only true forgiveness arrives as gift, given in the face of the inexpiable, a forgiveness that does not properly have a meaning, but impossibly responds nonetheless in an act of recognition. In order to meet these high standards of purity, in order for forgiveness to sufficiently express that which it already is by definition, the derivation of its impossibility is thus two-fold, tied as much to the impossibility of the gift as to the impossibility of forgiving the unforgivable.

What Derrida repeatedly seeks to demonstrate is that forgiveness as gift cannot be conditioned upon anything at all. For Derrida, this means that there can be no enabling conditions for forgiveness, that it must arise freely. For Jean-Luc Marion, however, and eventually for Emmanuel Levinas as well, this impossibility of the gift is construed somewhat differently. For Marion, importantly, there can indeed be enabling conditions when gift is understood as “givenness” itself. And for Levinas, there must be such conditions, even in instances where forgiveness still exists as gift. Yet how can an economic pure gift remain pure while simultaneously allowing for the notion that its very existence is dependent upon certain enabling conditions. A possible resolution herein is that the givenness itself can be predicated on nothing, even though the event of the gift can only occur within a particular kind of situation.

It is precisely the purity of Derridean gift that Jean-Luc Marion takes to task in his landmark work, Being Given. Marion’s concern centers upon what exactly Derrida means by “impossible,” which for Derrida and for Marion most certainly does not mean that it does not happen. Himself always working on the limits of phenomenology, as Robyn Horner writes, “Marion asserts that phenomenology is possible and that, from a phenomenological perspective,

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321 Derrida, Cosmopolitanism, 34.
the gift is also possible,\textsuperscript{323} even if the limits met in the phenomenological analysis do not allow that analysis to produce knowledge properly speaking.\textsuperscript{324}

In order to further clarify the nature of such a gift, and the degree to which it might be possible or impossible, let us then turn for a moment to Marion’s specific critiques of Derridian gift. Like Derrida, he sees concern with the potential economic ramifications of receiving a gift. As Marion writes in \textit{Being Given}, “to decide to receive the gift is equivalent to deciding to become the one obliged by the gift.”\textsuperscript{325} And with Derrida, Marion argues that the subject can only benefit from the gift (as gift) when the gift is not recognized as such. The consequence, Marion argues, is that it would be impossible for the gift that arrives as gift to ever truly be gift. It is thus the case that the gift is never dependent in any real way upon the recipient. This bears striking consequences for Marion’s phenomenological analysis, because it reveals that the essence of givenness cannot reside in the receipt of the gift, as the recipient herself can be subject to phenomenological suspension in reference to understanding the gift itself.

Seeking to unearth the phenomenological center of givenness, then, Marion, carrying Derrida to his logical conclusion, similarly notes that the essence of givenness also cannot lie within the giver and thus the giver also can be phenomenologically suspended.\textsuperscript{326} It is herein that the crux of Marion’s claim comes to bear, for he argues that the possibility of a phenomenology of givenness is not even predicated upon the recognition of the gift as gift. As he writes in \textit{Being Given}, this phenomenology is in fact made possible precisely by the reduction of the gift just described, a phenomenology that has been made possible by what Marion calls the “bracketing


\textsuperscript{324} Horner, \textit{Rethinking God}, 125. In \textit{Being Given}, and elsewhere Marion suggests instead that phenomenology is not necessarily bound by the principle of sufficient reason.

\textsuperscript{325} Marion, \textit{Being Given}, 112.

\textsuperscript{326} Horner, \textit{Rethinking God}, 126.
of the gift in its three dimensions.”

Having demonstrated that the gift depends not upon the giver, the recipient, or its appearance as gift, one may legitimately ask then, as one so often does in Marion’s distinctive form of phenomenology, what remains after this triple epoché.

For Marion, against Derrida, the gift – though rare – remains very much a possibility. For Marion, what makes the gift a gift is its appearing as gift, the appearance of the object as gift, which signals its to-be-given-ness. Givenness is thus a phenomenological situation wherein something appears as givable, wherein it is the givability of the gift, the givability of the phenomenon, the givability as a way of appearing. Thus Derrida makes a very important contribution by saying that the gift is impossible (i.e. according to the way we usually understand metaphysics), but Marion sees Derrida’s error in Derrida’s conviction that the gift was beyond any philosophical understanding. For Marion, what makes the gift possible is the relation of possible and impossible, wherein we are led to understand possibility differently.

If we are to continue to think with Marion at this juncture, forgiveness understood as givenness thus effectively brackets enabling conditions from the phenomena itself, allowing both to exist in tension. What defines the gift is the fact that it can be given, not that it is given. And as such, the gift of forgiveness can exist with all purity, beyond all compulsion, in potentia until such a moment as one decides to give it. To word this slightly differently, we might suggest that forgiveness exists as gift even before it is given. Such an understanding of forgiveness therefore allows even for the possibility that there can be conditions under which its givenness can move from potential to actual. As we have already seen in the Rwandan context, and as we saw Emmanuel Levinas likewise note in Difficult Freedom, forgiveness can, even as gift, therefore still depend upon both the request offered and upon an expression of contrition on the part of the

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Marion, Being Given, 113.
criminal. And yet, understood in this manner, forgiveness as givenness simultaneously is able to resist any efforts at compulsion, because its very givenness would be lost the moment any individual or institution tried to force its giving. Understood as givenness, therefore, the concept of forgiveness, itself understood as a crucial step in the reconciliation processes at work in Rwanda, is able to sustain the conditions under which it may manifest as event while simultaneously eschewing any compulsory demands that it must be given. As such, this represents a crucial way of speaking about the phenomenon that is attentive first to the lived realities experienced by ordinary Rwandans as they live through and create for themselves the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

V. Conclusion

As we bring this discussion to a close, we are met with a final conundrum, one which for the moment I must leave open. I have suggested that forgiveness, as a part of the reconciliation process, when understood as givenness can both remain a gift that only the victim has the right to give, that this gift cannot be compelled, and that there may remain nonetheless conditions under which the givenness of the gift may be made manifest. Principal among these conditions are the request to be forgiven, confession, truth-telling, and the expression of contrition.

One of these conditions, however, presents a particular difficulty. If we are to insist, as is claimed in so many testimonies, that true contrition is a necessity, this claim is predicated upon the assumption that remorse flows from a full understanding of the nature of the crimes which have been committed. And yet it is far from certain that such an understanding may ever be fully possible. As a kind of singularity in meaning, genocide is one particular crime whose depths only deepen with every inquiry. It is a point which always holds more mysteries than it reveals, for
even as more and more knowledge is produced from the event, still deeper questions always remain.

Beta Uwazaninka of the Bugasera describes this difficulty well in her own testimony:

I don’t know what kind of forgiveness people mean. If you kill someone, you take his or her life away and it’s impossible to mend it. It has gone forever. Those people have gone and cannot give forgiveness. Even if I forgive the man who killed my mother, she’s no longer there to forgive him. I may forgive, but I won’t ever forget. How can you forget that you once had parents? How can there be forgiveness when the impact of genocide is still with us?328

How can one express contrition for events whose fullness and consequences can only become known in time? How can one forgive another for events whose full depths are not yet known? For these are always the systemic realities of trauma; they need time to become known.

“Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars need time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard.”329 It is perhaps ironic how well these words of Friedrich Nietzsche resonate. It remains true that one needs time to understand the most monstrous of deeds.

The enduring question, then, is whether one can forgive that which is not yet understood. The answer, in practice at least, would appear to be unequivocally in the affirmative. For is not this lack of clarity always the systemic reality? Knowledge is always incomplete, partial, deferred. The incredible aspect of forgiveness, and the reconciliation process that it enables, lies in the fact that the gift of forgiveness – in the very moment when its givnenness manifests – is still an event. An event nonetheless that is incomplete, hidden, and which yet holds radical possibilities. It is, perhaps, an event in the strongest Derridean sense of the word. It is the completely new, the reinauguration of the place of the Other herself. For when the event transpires, it transpires in a radical moment, when one chooses to see another again as human.

328 Whitworth, We Survived, 254.
And even as knowledge must remain eternally deferred, with the recognition implicit in forgiveness and reconciliation, relationship can begin again. Independent of its potential, however, such recognition, such forgiveness, and even reconciliation nonetheless begin with the private choice over which each individual retains the exclusive rights.
Conclusion

“If your conscience accuses you of what you did, then ask for forgiveness. It is true that those you offended can only forgive you... it still doesn’t clear away the crime you committed.”

– Nshimiyimana Claude, Oral Testimony – Gisozi

“Even if it’s a Hutu who killed my family and he comes when he is broken down, I would forgive him because he is a human being. If someone comes and kneels before me and says it from the depth of his heart... you can tell, and I can forgive them.”

– Murebwayire Josephine, Oral Testimony – Gisozi

Between Levinas and Rwanda a rather remarkable phenomenon has emerged as it functions within human consciousness: that of pardon, and specifically, of pardon in the face of the unpardonable. Let us turn, then, to what has been unearthed through this experiment in dialogical phenomenology. What we have learned, which we will now examine in greater detail, is that as a human phenomenon enacted through dialogical encounter, pardon is marked by an insistence on memory, the ability to reorder time, the requirement of private and public acts of contrition, and the demand for a tempered justice, while functioning as a gift (in the purest sense of the term) that has the ability through acts of recognition to begin the arduous process of

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restoring individual relationships and reweaving communities that have both been torn apart by acts of violence.

As a fully human phenomenon, pardon is always a fundamentally dialogical moment between actual embodied human beings with real and tangible needs. Within Levinas we saw that pardon has the ability to function to release one from the bindings of totalizing historical ontology precisely because it serves to re-orient individuals within the world to the differences encountered through face-to-face interactions among actual embodied persons, and to the responsibilities which are a direct result of those encounters. Quite simply then, in a world torn apart by violence, it is through such encounters that ethics becomes again possible. The possibility of responsibility which thus ensues from encounter, which itself represents a truer freedom, the freedom to be responsible, is likewise that which makes the interpersonal phenomenon of forgiveness possible. For as we shall see, it is only in a world where the possibilities of ethical responsibility have been restored that the requirements might be met which allow forgiveness to be given.

Pardon is therefore a phenomenon that functions directly between human agents, unmediated by divine action or influence. This bears the important consequence of prohibiting, completely, any form of third-party forgiveness. One cannot forgive someone on behalf of another, nor can one be forgiven by an agent other than the one harmed. Levinas describes this well in his famous 1963 Talmudic lecture when he notes that there can be no forgiveness by God for crimes committed against another person. The key herein is that crimes against the divine can be forgiven by the divine, but crimes committed against another human can only be forgiven by that human. This is a move toward clarifying, precisely, the nature of the harms which have been
committed, as well as a recognition of the reality that a single action can easily result in multiple violations.

A single murder, therefore, represents not merely an interpersonal crime against a single person. As has been made clear in Rwanda’s Gacaca courts, this action likewise represents a criminal act toward the surviving members of the family, having lost love ones and often suffering substantial personal trauma as a result. Additionally, it represents a crime of property, as the individual loss typically also bears financial realities through the loss of income generation abilities or the loss of tangible assets. There may also be a crime against a community, revealed in the fact that the murder may be meant to instill fear or cause intimidation within a given population. There may likewise result crimes against the stability of a political state, crimes which become the domain of the polis itself. Finally, in religious contexts, such a crime may likewise represent a violation of religious laws, necessitating a reconciliatory process within one’s religious tradition.

It is for this reason that in both Levinas’s texts and in Rwandan practice we find great resistance to the institutionalization of forgiveness. Neither governments nor religious organizations can offer forgiveness for crimes committed between and against human agents. Each crime must be addressed individually and by the agents properly and directly involved. This means that the possibility of both third-party forgiveness, and any form of infinite forgiveness or forgiveness granted in advance are explicitly prohibited. As we saw explained well by both Derrida and Levinas, any form of third-party forgiveness represents a wholly inappropriate attempt to speak on behalf of the victims. In pardon, it is the voice of the victim which must retain its place of prominence. It is the one harmed alone who may offer forgiveness to a perpetrator, when and if such forgiveness is granted. Thus while reconciliation may be
accomplished with surviving members of the deceased, and forgiveness for the loss suffered by those surviving members may even be granted, it must remain the case that in instances of murder, there can be no forgiveness within our temporal existence for the crime committed directly against the deceased. There remain, therefore, crimes for which forgiveness remains beyond the boundaries of the possible.

Pardon can likewise be granted in such direct-encounter situations only when the demands of memory and memorialization have been fulfilled. In the strongest possible sense, forgiveness does not entail the abdication of memory. Forgiveness cannot be granted without increased clarity concerning the precise nature of the actions which have been committed, a requirement which entails crafting clear narratives concerning the events which transpired. And while in forgiveness this may entail the ability to release an individual from the guilt of certain actions (where as noted previously understanding issues of the precise attributability of crimes is of paramount importance), it does not mean that individual actions are forgotten, disregarded, or treated as if they had not transpired. Acts of violence remain – without exception – ensconced in the realities of individual lives. There can be no erasure. Such acts stand firm.

To be pardoned, therefore, is not to be rendered innocent. It is, rather, to acknowledge the necessity of preserving the past, of preserving those singularities (or surds) in meaning represented by the extreme desecrations of violence. And as we have seen, in Rwanda this preservation has transpired – and continues to transpire – in a manner unique within the modern world. Through the Gacaca trials – regardless of the criticism they have faced – the narratives of memory have been written between victims and perpetrators, initially through communal oral history, and then receiving clarification through the written documentation processes required by these courts. Society itself as a narrative construction finds the origins of its reweaving in exactly
these moments, for, as we saw in certain paintings, there can be no new community without the presence and voices of all of its members. An experiment on such a grand scale has never before been attempted following violence of the extent seen in Rwanda, and is a chief contributor to the reconstruction of the modern Rwandan community and state.

To forgive and remember, then, requires careful attention to the experiences, stories, and even physical spaces that mark life in a post-genocide context. As we saw in the church-memorials of Rwanda, it is possible to reclaim even some of the sites of the most profound violence, if this restoration is conducted carefully and respectfully. Through the memorialization present in the Roman Catholic church in Kibuye we see one example of what it could mean to live among and with the past. The murals in this incredible space serve as a constant reminder of what transpired therein, even as paper doves and joyous choral music serve as reminders of the future that remains possible. To be in the Kibuye church, therefore, is to live among the dead while living for a new future, one that owns the past upon which it is built with direct honesty.

One of the most impressive markers of the greatest memorials therefore, as is the case within the Kibuye church, lies in their ability to function not as static images or objects, but akin to the notion of a religious icon which serves to initiate conversation and dialogue by opening a window into another time, place, and reality. It may likewise be the case, however, that certain spaces remain beyond the possibility of reclamation, even if individuals have been able to grant forgiveness for individual crimes therein committed. Itself a singularity in meaning that only deepens with every inquiry, it is probable that the terrible stain in the Sunday School of Ntarama may remain forever beyond cleansing.

For what rituals, or what actions could cleanse such a place? It may well be that the only appropriate response to such a stain is for visitors to occupy the place of Rizpah, to be the ones
who refuse to look away from such horrors, who instead convey dignity through their difficult choice to join the ranks of those who function as the living bearers of memory. As I have learned well myself, certain things cannot be unseen. Such places, places designed to preserve horrors, can avoid the dangers of voyeurism when constructed carefully, and can instead provide outside visitors with the ability to experience directly the singularities that define modern Rwandan life. After certain experiences, there is no return to a time before. Through the singularity, through the surd, everything is forever altered. And to carry such memories likewise entails responsibilities, responsibilities to ponder, to examine, to share, to prevent, and to grieve. Just as not every crime may be forgiven, so too is it the case that not every place may be purified. And yet, these impossible places remain nonetheless the context from which one ponders forgiveness. In places like Ntarama, the full depths of the difficulties entailed in the possibility of forgiveness are revealed viscerally. In such places we learn physically what it truly means to claim that when forgiveness does occur and when reclamation is possible – which as we shall see when we turn to the discussion of forgiveness as gift remains a possibility realized only in the choice of concrete individuals – both rest upon the firm foundations of memory and memorialization.

When forgiveness does occur, then, it always represents an alteration of human experiences of and consciousness of time itself. Enacting the reversibility of time by returning past moments to impossible presence, forgiveness is that which manifests “la puissance d’effacer, de délier, de défaire l’histoire” / “the power to efface, to untie, to undo history” (Tel 207.33ff / TaI 231.23ff). As an act transpiring between embodied individuals, like the encounter with the Other herself, pardon represents the ability to rupture the totalization of being ensconced within the domination of a world history dedicated to the one. Within pardon, reality itself is understood as fundamentally resting on difference, not unity. It is that difference, that
unassailable uniqueness of each individual, that allows pardon to reverse the irreversibility of time, to allow the past to be returned to presence while at the same time posing individuals to look together toward the distant hills which represent a new future. As we saw in the discussion within Levinas of the move from délier to renouer, within pardon history is both loosened and retied, and narratives and communities are woven back together, out of the same broken strands, but in a new manner that allows the possibility of envisioning a future once again.

Pardon thus maintains the ability to reorder and rewrite experiences of time. Pardon reverses the irreversibility of time, reenacts a true present wherein the responsibility that flows from encounter is again possible. Like the sculpture of the ostrich from the National Museum of Art in Rwanda, within acts of pardon the individual and the community bring together the broken moments of their histories to imagine a new creation. Poised ready to run toward a new future, the very identity of the ostrich is cemented together from the shards which remain after violence. But it is only when attachment to resentment and violence are eschewed that this new hybrid temporal creation – blending past, present and future – is able to break free. When it happens, the phenomenon of pardon opens new worlds through this reorientation of time, wherein once again the narratives of individuals’ lives again become theirs to create and to write, and within which to ever again find new meaning. Within pardon, time becomes reoriented by concrete Others, and with the recognition of the responsibilities revealed through such encounters, the world begins again.

For forgiveness to transpire, however, both public and private acts of contrition are required. One must demonstrate both remorse and efforts at restoration. Survivors reveal in testimony repeatedly that an individual must first show true contrition before asking for forgiveness. And time and again in the Rwandan context we saw that in order for one to forgive
another, the offender must first seek forgiveness; the offender must initiate the speech act that is fulfilled in pardon. In both Levinas and in Rwanda we saw that without restitution and an attempt to rectify the harm committed as far as is possible, there can be no forgiveness. Levinas is careful to note as well that without such attempts at restoration, in the wake of violence there can be no peace within the world. Such demonstrations of contrition likewise must occur directly to the one harmed, and as we have seen, never toward a proxy. And yet, contrition and repentance alone are insufficient, for without consequence pardon becomes a cruel and unjust form of impunity which cannot be allowed to continue. Thus in the wake of extreme violence, while requirements, remorse and repentance are not in themselves sufficient. There must be justice.

For both Levinas and Rwanda, justice remains an inescapable requirement if forgiveness is to occur. As the apparatus through which punishment and efforts toward restitution can be initiated, justice represents the formal and public process of acknowledging wrongdoing and simultaneously represents a first step toward restitution. Within the Gacaca trials, individuals were publicly given the opportunity to demonstrate a change in behavior through the enforced enactment of acts of restitution, and thereby begin the arduous process of reintegration into society. Crimes must bear consequences, for universal pardon (represented by blanket amnesty) can result only in the complete abdication of justice. The necessity of punishment remains, even after forgiveness has been granted.

At the same time, in both Levinasian and Rwandan contexts we saw the need that justice find a balance between punishment and leniency. In the piece “No. 59 73 94” discussed earlier in this work, while the chains of justice remain, we remember that the lock was left open. In Levinas, while the right of vengeance remains, to be Israel, to be a people who dwells in the
midst of the infinite, is to forswear this right of extreme vengeance. In each case we see that while pardon is only possible following the establishment and institution of justice, that justice must likewise be tempered. As a reimagined form of traditional justice emerging from what Levinas referred to as an intimate community, the legal codes ensconced in the Gacaca trials were an effort to enact exactly this understanding of a tempered justice, one which places restoration of relationship between individuals over the strict demands of a harsh justice. While justice is inescapable, the restorative model seen in Rwanda is one which initiates conversation and encounter, rather than prohibiting it.

Thus we have seen a number of requirements which are necessary to create the kind of situation within which pardon might be granted to an offender by a victim: memory must be preserved; time must be reoriented; contrition must be demonstrated through acts of remorse and repentance; efforts at restitution must be offered; and the demands of justice, while tempered, must nonetheless be met. Once these demands have been met, however, rather than becoming a requirement that can be compelled, pardon becomes – critically – a possibility.

As we have seen, numerous institutions and agents do in practice attempt to compel forgiveness. Government institutions, like those in Rwanda who realize the direct ties between stories of ‘successful reconciliation’ of communities and foreign economic investments, frequently come extremely close to demanding – and at times outright do demand – that individuals forgive others. Christian organizations in Rwanda likewise engage in frequent rhetoric that states that forgiveness is not merely a possible choice, but a requirement of one’s faith itself. The latter has the unfortunate consequence of pressuring one to forgive by suggesting one’s immortal soul may be in danger if one is unable to forgive.
While such rhetoric in Rwanda is genuinely crafted with legitimately good intentions on the governmental side to serve the increased development of the nation, and on the religious side to fulfil what are perceived by religious leaders as the demands of Christian faith (demands which such leaders believe may actuate genuine forms of healing within individuals), efforts to compel – rather than to facilitate the possible manifestation of – forgiveness stand in stark opposition to experiences of pardon revealed by actual embodied individuals. From such individuals, it is clear that pardon – when it occurs – is given as a gift by the victim, the individual who *alone* retains the ability and right to bestow or not bestow this gift.

From this experiment in dialogical phenomenology, we have found that within human experiences of pardon, forgiveness functions as a gift that can *never* be compelled. The moment such compulsion is suggested or enters the phenomenon, the distinctive characteristic of pardon, that of its fundamental givenness, is destroyed. With compulsion, the phenomenon itself is rendered impotent. The difficulty, of course, lies in how to discuss a phenomenon which is understood as pure gift beyond all forms of compulsion while simultaneously arguing that this gift may only manifest in a situation where certain requirements have been met. Essentially, what is at play is the possibility of an conditioned unconditionality. I argue, however, that such requirements do not condition the giveability of pardon itself. They instead create a change in the systemic reality of the individual facing a choice to forgive; they create a new world in which the phenomenon becomes, unconditioned and uncompelled, a possibility. I have suggested that one way to mediate this difficulty is to reframe pardon with Jean-Luc Marion in terms of givenness rather than as Derridean gift. Any potential givenness, importantly, therefore exists prior to and independent of any actual manifestation of pardon. As I have argued, as givenness rather than as gift, pardon remains defined by the freedom inherent in the *characteristic* of the givability of the
phenomenon, rather than simply by the act of giving (which as an act is far more subject to destructive possibilities inherent in compulsion).

Ultimately, then, especially when understood as defined by its givenness, the right to exercise pardon remains that of the individual. Individuals outside of the direct encounter, therefore, have absolutely no right to suggest that forgiveness must occur, or even – as Holmgren does – that forgiveness is always the “right” response to wrongdoing. To demand we understand forgiveness as a personal choice, therefore, carries important consequences. While when it is possible, pardon has the ability to open new imaginative and restorative possibilities to individuals and communities, it means critically that individuals always retain the right not to forgive. The decision to forgive or not to forgive – as we saw in both Levinas and in Rwanda – remains the exclusive right of the individual who has been harmed, and she can bear no fault or condemnation when in individual situations she may find herself unable to forgive. Deeply personal, the choice remains hers alone. And as such, forgiveness is, very simply, not always possible.

When it is possible, and when it does manifest, pardon exhibits the remarkable ability to restore relationship between individuals without releasing an individual from the responsibilities derived from the actions which have transpired. In other words, the debt remains; there remain real consequences for actions, consequences which cannot ever be simply elided. As an act in speech that occurs between two agents in an intimate face-to-face encounter, pardon is therefore most fundamentally an act of recognition in the very deepest sense. It is a willingness to encounter the other person once again as an Other, as a fully human agent – who as Griswold

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332 Holmgren. Forgiveness.
noted can now be seen as more than just the author of a single act\textsuperscript{333} – to whom one owes and bestows respect, acknowledgment, and even responsibility. When it does occur, pardon therefore has the ability through recognition to weave together individual relationships and entire communities, to once again create a \textit{people} with the ability to look together in the same direction, bearing close their broken past while simultaneously looking out over the hills together toward the possibility of a new – and beautiful – future.

\section*{Remaining Questions}

As I bring this statement of the theory of pardon developed herein to a close, two questions in particular remain open to further examination and speculation. First, a question persists regarding the interplay between the infinite distance represented by alterity in Levinas’s system, and notions of hybrid identity which emerge from the Rwandan context. Second, the requirement that one understand the nature of horrific events in order to offer contrition appropriately presents an epistemic difficulty when addressing what I have often referred to as singularities in meaning. Before concluding, therefore, we will turn briefly to each of these questions.

The analysis undertaken herein points to two rather different – though potentially not mutually exclusive – presentations of the nature of human identity. Within the Levinasian corpus, individual selfhood is distinctive in reference to ethical responsibility precisely because of the ways in which it maintains an absolute interval from the selfhood of another agent. Levinasian agents meet face to face from across a complete abyss which cannot ever be traversed. The self and the Other are \textit{not} simply differential manifestations of an unifying and

\textsuperscript{333} Griswold. \textit{Forgiveness}. 
underlying ontology. They are, rather, infinitely different, unique, singular. In fact, within Levinas’s system it is this very differentiation that initially draws the self toward the Other as the Other represents a boundary in meaning and understanding that cannot be traversed. The self first discovers its selfhood because, with advent of the Other, the self encounters a limit to its epistemic acquisition and, in Levinas’s terms, totalization. And it is this same limit which likewise initiates the transfer of responsibility through the hineni encountered upon the face of the Other, calling out for respect, recognition, and protection.

Emerging from within the Rwandan context, however, a rather different understanding of selfhood emerges. Particularly within the Rwandan paintings and sculptures, we find instead a conception of selfhood that is not one of infinite difference, but instead radically hybrid. Individual identities are composed of both the self and the realities and attributes of Others. Within the works discussed in the fourth chapter of this work, even bodies do not appear to remain discreet, with the arms of one person becoming the legs of another, or where colors and textures change within the parts of individual bodies that overlap. While on one level it may be the case that these overlapping moments of hybridity may speak more to Rwandan conceptions of community than individual identity, this seems to be an overly simple interpretation. The paintings, rather, do seem to claim strongly that even the individual is composed in part through and by its contact with Others.

To resolve these two different conceptions of individual selfhood requires greater space than the scope of the current work will allow, but I will nonetheless offer an initial suggestion of the direction in which such an inquiry might proceed. I am not certain that these two understandings of identity are necessarily as opposed as they first appear. It may well be the case that it is both possible for individual selves to remain radically separate and unique while
nonetheless allowing individual selfhood to be constructed in part with and through others. Individual identity, particularly in the sense we have already discussed of the self as having been always-already harmed, is indeed to varying degrees always cut and woven back together as a fractured and hybrid narrative creation. The contemporary self is perhaps marked most strongly in its development by the ways in which it is broken by the realities of profound violence. Any recovery in the wake of such violence therefore necessarily entails the reweaving of disparate and damaged pieces into a new whole, both for the individual and for the community.

I would like to suggest, however, that there may persist a kind of reserve to the self which transcends the hybrid identities created through interpersonal encounter. Indeed, this is what Levinas means precisely when he speaks of the face itself. As the portal to the innermost core of an individual, the face-to-face encounter is understood in Levinasian thought to represent a part of the individual which lies beyond concrete attributes, famously even beyond the attribute of existence. Thus while it is beyond existence that the encounter with radical difference occurs – one which thereby establishes the possibility of ethical responsibility – once such an encounter has occurred an individual must necessarily function as a being with concrete embodied attributes if one is to act upon that responsibility to meet the needs of an Other. And at this level, all of the beautiful dependencies of an identity created with and through encounters with Others may legitimately re-enter the discussion.

Such a two-level understanding of selfhood may likewise present an important corrective to Levinasian thought, which does at times perhaps present the self and Other as so radically distinct that even the possibility of communicating the basic hineni from across an interval of absolute distance would represent an epistemic impossibility. In this case, then, it may be that Rwandan thought and practice can bring to Levinasian scholarship a more nuanced
understanding of the ways in which individual identity is defined through and by those around us without nullifying the infinite distance represented within the Levinasian and ethically generative face-to-face encounter. While I would like to suggest that agents do remain ultimately separate in the way Levinas claims, as unique and irreplaceable in their fullest depths, it is likewise the case that individual identity, as well as the construction of communities, are always hybrid creations, being rewritten in narrative in every moment.

The second question regards the seemingly impossible epistemic requirement that a perpetrator understand the nature of the actions s/he has committed prior to expressing the true contrition which is one of the necessary conditions to create the environment within which pardon emerges as a possibility. Within both Levinasian and Rwandan contexts, one of the central requirements that must be met in order to create a situation within which forgiveness may manifest is the expression of contrition on behalf of the offender. At the same time, however, in this work I have repeatedly suggested that such moments of extreme violence or horror represent a kind of singularity in meaning. Certain events rupture our understandings of normal experience in such a way that every additional inquiry seems to reveal further depth. A kind of surplus in meaning therefore persists in such events. How then, one might ask, is it possible for one to express contrition for events whose full meaning is not yet known, and whose full meaning may never be fully known?

This raises a question concerning whether pardon therefore functions as a singular event or as an open and ongoing process. From within the testimony we have examined, we have most often seen discussions of pardon as being represented in a concrete and specific moment in time, evidence which would lead toward the conclusion of pardon as maintaining status as an event rather than a process. Indeed the very recognition which lies close to the center of the
phenomenon likewise suggests that pardon functions as event. And yet, further revelation of the nature of horrific events is inevitable with time, suggesting that an offender would need to continue the process of contrition into an undefined future. The difficulty rests with the ability to define pardon as an act of recognition occurring in a specific moment, even though the possibility thereof remains conditioned upon contrition expressed for knowledge that is not yet revealed, and potentially never attained.

I suggest, therefore, that while pardon may manifest as a phenomenon in a specific moment and function as an event (therefore singular in appearance and meaning) following expressions of contrition that occur with genuine intent (themselves made only after thoughtful examination of knowledge of events available at the time), the relationship initiated through the recognition inherent in pardon may likewise maintain the ability to allow for the continuation of such expressions of contrition into an indefinite future because the initial event inaugurates an ongoing dialogue through the act of recognition itself. It may be, then, that the recognition initiated through pardon maintains the ability to hold open a dialogue which may deepen with time as further details are revealed and understood from such singularities in meaning emerging from acts of profound violence. This, however, remains a question requiring further data collection, description, and phenomenological examination, and whether pardon functions as an event or as an ongoing process involving an endlessly repeating series of events thus must remain at the moment an open question.

**Dialogical Phenomenology**

The resolution of these two open questions brings us back for a final time to questions of methodology. For as much as this work has been an examination of the content of the human
phenomenon of pardon, it has likewise been a bold experiment in methodology. Rather than attempting to evaluate Rwandan practices through an European philosophical lens, or to critique philosophy from the perspective of Rwandan experience, my effort herein has been to develop and demonstrate the possibilities which might emerge from a dialogical phenomenology. The effort has been to allow the discussion to flow in multiple directions, engaging in parallel lines of inquiry in such a manner that conversation between them may further illuminate both strands of thoughts.

I would suggest therefore that further use of this methodological approach may be instructive in the process of answering the questions we have just discussed. On the first question, of hybrid vs infinitely alterior understandings of selfhood, further dialogical interplay of both philosophical texts and individual testimonies would likely prove instructive in revealing whether both conceptions of selfhood can meaningfully coexist. On the second question, bringing the philosophical inquiry into dialogue with individual experiences of living with memory – and its continuing revelations – following acts of forgiveness and the re-initiation of relationship between individuals could likewise prove instructive.

The effort in each case, as has been the effort throughout this work, would require the broadest collection of data that describe the human experiences of each. Philosophy in America today, sadly, continues to express broad reticence to the use of actual data within the development of philosophical analysis. Often pejoratively referred to as a kind of empty empiricism, I contend instead that phenomenology as a method maintains the critical capacity to engage in human phenomena in a manner more attentive to the lives and embodied experiences of individual Others than does the analytic approach which has for too long dominated American philosophical thought.
By returning, in Husserl’s famous words, *to the things themselves*, phenomenology gives a place of prominence to real manifestations of actual phenomena within the world, over and above idealized or rationally constructed visions of how such phenomena ought to appear. It therefore returns a degree of faith in the ability of individuals to experience and describe the components of their own lives and explicitly values such descriptions together with their phenomenological reduction over competing approaches which at their worst degenerate into armchair analytic philosophy. Additionally, by placing multiple phenomenological descriptive efforts in conversational tandem, a dialogical phenomenological approach has the ability to resist intellectual colonialism by providing and demonstrating real respect and honor to the thoughts and practices of those outside of the so-called ‘first world.’

A dialogical phenomenological approach claims without hesitation that the peoples of this planet do indeed share certain experiences in common, that human beings are not marked primarily by radical cultural differentiation, but that by feature of their common humanity they share certain similarities. While this conclusion is one which is commonplace within scientific communities today, it is unfortunately one which still meets great resistance within humanities fields which have become deeply entrenched in both cultural relativism and an unswerving historicism that treats all historical situations as unique, and remains suspicious of efforts to claim common ground across cultural lines. The return to actual and diverse data represented in a dialogical phenomenological approach is an important methodological claim, because as we have found, nontraditional philosophical data sources – such as painting, testimony, sculpture, sermon, rhetoric, and even architecture – can prove deeply instructive and can serve to reveal critical aspects the nature of the human phenomena we as a species share.
I would like to suggest finally that a dialogical phenomenological approach, an addition to the benefits already discussed and demonstrated, likewise maintains the ability to bring partners into discussion in a manner that resists certain powered divisions which course through the contemporary world. Differential value judgments of “first” and “third” world hold far less meaning when the effort is – from the very outset – one of real dialogue toward shared goals. I contend that as a result dialogical phenomenology may prove better able to resist forms of cultural hegemony and oppression than competing methodological approaches. It therefore may prove to be of particularly benefit in situations where substantial differentials between power and privilege exist among conversation partners.

The Power of a Garden: Infinity and Possibility

In the current investigation, dialogical phenomenology has allowed us to investigate a human phenomenon in discussion between two post-genocide contexts, that of post-Holocaust Europe and of post-genocide Rwanda. As we know the events which transpired within Rwanda in 1994 are unfortunately not unique. The destruction of the Herero, the annihilation of the Armenian population in Turkey, the eleven million persons killed in the European Holocaust, the Cambodian autogenocide, the genocides of the former Yugoslavian republics, the mass exterminations being conducted today by terrorist and autocratic regimes in the Middle East, and even the radical racism in American urban police enforcement that seeks to disenfranchise and damage entire generations of African American men all serve as testimony that such violence can – and does – break out in any place and in any time.

The continuing reality as well is that within the contemporary world there exist currently, and will likewise continue to exist for some time, places where individuals will be forced to
continue to question the possibility of forgiveness following acts of extreme violence. We do not choose to be harmed, but we can choose what to do in the wake of that violence. The current investigation has been a concerted effort to provide a window into one possible means of individual recovery and societal transformation by examining manifestations of pardon when they can and do appear within the rebuilding and reweaving processes of societies following extreme violence.

Throughout the investigation I have generally and consciously privileged individual experience over governmental or religious claims. This has become most evident, perhaps in the discussion of forgiveness as givenness, wherein I have claimed that pardon lies beyond the possibility of compulsion. In the cases I have thus examined, we have seen efforts at compulsion arriving from both governmental and religious sources, efforts which have in no uncertain terms argued that the very future success of the nation and even the status of an individual’s immortal soul lie in jeopardy should one fail to forgive. Opposing this, we have seen ardent and bold claims by individuals that pardon – when and if it is possible – remains the right of an individual alone to give. We have seen the emergence of a phenomenon for which this very givenness is in fact a defining and unalterable characteristic.

In many cases, these efforts at compulsion result from a lack of clarity by government organizations of the precise nature of individuals’ experiences, and a lack of willingness by certain religious interests to imagine pardon apart from the dictates of theology, both points to which this work has striven to provide a corrective. There remains, however, a very prominent example I would like to discuss in closing which serves as evidence of a moment where diverse interests were able to come together in Rwanda to present a scenario which is deeply in keeping with the conclusions that have been reached in this work. For within the gardens of the National
Memorial at Gisozi, through the concerted dialogical combination of individual testimony, the planning and design efforts of religious, non-governmental, and governmental organizations, and attention to the experiences of actual individuals, a progression has been created which demonstrates well exactly the scenario which allows pardon to appear, the scenario I have sought to explain in this work.

The National Memorial at Gisozi lies on a hill directly facing Kiyovu, central Kigali. And while the interior of the structure is itself an impressive educational facility and memorial, it is the gardens which will draw our final interest. On the far side of the memorial building lie a series of three gardens. The first, the Garden of Unity, contains a central wellspring fountain, from which water flows into a circular oasis pool surrounded by the shade and comfort of overhanging trees. The water from this pool overflows down a stream into the second garden, the Garden of Disunity. This space is dominated by a central pool marked by six protrusions into disparate directions. Each protrusion contains a statue of an elephant – a symbol of memory as elephants can return to sources of water and thus of life, over vast distances – but each statue is facing away from the others, singular and without any dialogical encounter. The first two gardens are designed to narrate the story of Rwanda’s history, one wherein an originally unified community was torn apart by the division and isolation initiated through the Belgian colonial period and racist classification of the Rwandan population.

The third garden, however, the Garden of Reconciliation, speaks of an entirely new world. Neither returning to a new Garden of Unity, nor remaining within the division of the Garden of Disunity, this third garden is very much a hybrid creation. The central fountain is surrounded by five circular planters, themselves evocative in shape of the central pool of the Garden of Unity. In this third garden, the individual planters – representing the different
individual interests and communities within the modern state – surround a central pool that is itself dominated by a large and important fountain.

_Garden of Reconciliation, National Memorial at Gisozi, Rwanda_

Composed of rocks from on site and across the nation, and then cemented together under running water, this fountain is the central feature of the Garden of Reconciliation. Like the sculpture of the ostrich discussed in the fourth chapter of this work, this fountain is composed of disparate elements in an effort to create something new. It is imperfect and the entire structure is a bit precarious. At the top and bottom the rocks are beginning to come apart, to separate from the structure. But it is exactly this attribute that makes the fountain so powerful. As a symbol of reconciliation, this is a creation that will have to be put back together, again and again. Just as
the larger society will need ongoing and careful attention, so too as time passes, will the fountain require the ongoing and attentive care of those who guard its safety and integrity. They will need to mend the broken portions – as the nation will need to continually pause to mend its broken pieces – and to continue an ongoing process of eternally recreating the world it represents.

At the edge of the garden stands a final statue of an elephant, a bearer of memory, who this time holds a cellular telephone as it faces out over the hills. From what has been learned in Rwanda, from the memories that are inescapable, it calls out to the rest of the world in the hope that the memory and understanding of what has transpired in Rwanda might serve to help prevent similar atrocities at future points in other locations in the world.

The Garden of Reconciliation, however, does not flow into one of forgiveness. In fact, there is no Garden of Pardon in this space, and not even a hint of the notion that one must forgive. Pardon as a phenomenon is entirely absent, and this in itself may be one of the most powerful realities of the entire memorial. The Garden of Reconciliation opens instead to the mass graves, themselves flanked by rose gardens where every rose, like every person, is different in color, shape, and composition. Each one is unique, just like each of the more than quarter million persons for whom the mass graves are a final resting place.

The progression a visitor experiences, therefore, is directly from reconciliation to memorialization. Memory is, and ought to remain, an inescapable component of the possibility of recovery in Rwanda. And from the mass graves, the memorial opens onto the city. The dialectic herein portrayed between reconciliation and memory is powerful. Unity-disunity-reconciliation-memory-life; reconciliation is not forgetting but choosing to be cemented together out of disunity into form, sustained by the life giving waters which flow from both past goods and horrors into the creation of the new. The fountain erupts from within and then bathes the
structure of cemented stones with a healing soothing water suggesting as it looks both forward and backward that memory itself may hold healing powers.

Surrounding the entire memorial, however, in a phrase to which we have returned several times, “life, profligate, irrepressible – flaunts itself everywhere.”\textsuperscript{334} Roosters crow in the distance and the air is filled with the sounds of birds chirping, while the rush of traffic continues across the hillside in the city as life moves on, flaunting itself all around this site of witness set high across the valley from the central city, as if calling out to it eternally to remember its past even as it surges forward.

The life which one may view from the memorial, the larger world which continues, is viewed from a place of reconciliation and memory. And while pardon is absent within the memorial itself, it is perhaps this very interplay between memory and future hope that can serve in form to create the kind of conditions within which pardon itself becomes a possibility. The memorial does not demand forgiveness, it does not even ask that one forgive. But in a rare cooperative moment designed and created dialogically between governmental, non-governmental, religious, and individual interests and visions, the memorial gardens of Gisozi do represent the conditions within which one may ponder the question of forgiveness. They open a door through memorial into genuine and honest encounter, setting up viscerally the realities of what all encounter in the wake of violence truly entails.

It leaves open the possibilities of imagining anew what a world that comprises memorialization, reconciliation, and justice might become when it can turn again to cooperatively creating a future \textit{from} the resources which have come to define it in new and innovative ways. But perhaps more than anything, as an educational facility, the memorial is

\textsuperscript{334} Brison. \textit{Aftermath}, 123.
designed from these realities to facilitate encounter. As a whole it serves to make possible an encounter both with the past and with the future, encounters which are at their very core encounters with concrete Others, whether living or dead. And as we have seen, it is only when such encounters can again become possible – in the deepest sense of the term – that the phenomenon of pardon becomes imaginable again as a profound act of recognition.

To pardon another is most fundamentally to recognize that person as a fellow human being, not erasing or minimizing the actions of the past, but choosing in spite of them to imagine a new future with that individual. This encounter, one which Levinas spent his life investigating and which manifests daily in Rwanda, is crucial, for by opening a doorway to the Other, one opens a doorway into the infinite possibilities that might arrive from the knowledge that all Others are themselves representations of infinity, a concept which as Levinas has noted has for too long been kept in the shadows of the dominant trends of analytic philosophy. It is to imagine what it might mean, in the wake of utter destruction, to live in the presence of the infinite possibilities revealed in every Other, and the possibility of living even in the presence of infinite itself.

For as we have seen, to be a people that dwells in the midst of the infinite is to recognize duties and possibilities that lie beyond the limitations of retaliation and vengeance. For Levinas this means to live as the chosen people of Israel, defined by him as the people who live in the presence of infinite and complete alterity, at times represented by the concrete Other, at times by the divine. Rwandans too express this notion of abiding in the presence of the infinite. Traditional pre-Christian Rwandan theology claims that “God sleeps in Rwanda,” that the divine, that the infinite, travels the entire world by day, but comes home to sleep in the pays des milles
In each case, to live in the midst of the infinite entails living in a world that cannot ignore the real depths revealed in encounters. It is to live instead with the most precious recognition possible, among agents who are profoundly imperfect, who have done horrifying things, and with whom one nonetheless shares the planet. It is only in the midst of the infinite, with that Other who always maintains a surplus of meaning, that one can begin to meld back together the broken and discarded shards of life in the wake of extreme violence and can begin to imagine the world anew.

As we have seen, pardon involves a number of concrete needs – memory, the reorganization of time, contrition, restitution, tempered justice – but when these pieces are in place, a situation is created in which true givenness can manifest, where forgiveness becomes a real possibility, where in remarkable acts of recognition individuals can choose to construct communities built upon the sure foundations of memory, but dedicated to peace. It means bearing the fullness of one’s history into a new future. And yet, while pondering that new future, it means refusing to look away from even the most horrifying moments – from stains which can never be cleansed, from bodies nailed to rocks – and to remain like Rizpah to tend to the broken and the dead in order to preserve the infinite dignity both merit. For it is only with the recognition entailed in such dignity that a new future can emerge, one in which pardon will continue to persist as an extraordinary possibility.

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Joseph D. Moser Jr., a native of Northport, Maine, completed a B.A. from Northwestern University in Religious Studies, Comparative Literature and Music, an M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School with a focus in ethics, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Northwestern University in Religious Studies. An ethicist with strong roots in both religion and philosophy, his research interests include alterity, violence, responsibility, and limit cases in phenomenology. His current research focuses upon the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the 1994 Rwandan Genocide in an effort to bring certain resources of contemporary French phenomenology to discussions and processes of justice and reconciliation in the wake of violence. Joseph received a Fulbright grant in 2010 to conduct his dissertation research – constructing a phenomenological theory of pardon – in Rwanda. A member of the Chicago Curling Club and the Northwestern Curling Club, Moser is a two-time National Champion in College Curling USA. In his free time he can be found spending time on the ice, singing in a choir, or cheering heartily for Duke basketball.