

Imagining Political Forgiveness in the Aftermath of Atrocities: Towards a Story of Collective Responsibility

by

Fiorella Rabuffetti

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Political Science
University of Alberta

© Fiorella Rabuffetti, 2015

Abstract

This thesis is a reconsideration of the phenomena of political apology and forgiveness as they have been framed in recent years in Uruguay but also in a growing social scientific literature.

Drawing on the contributions of Hannah Arendt, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jacques Derrida, as well as on some insights from Hegel, this work outlines a conceptualization of political forgiveness in the aftermath of atrocities as a collective struggle through the tragic paradoxes of political action, between the conceptual impossibility of the community overcoming the loss and the practical possibility of togetherness after that loss. The acknowledgment of collective responsibility is presented as the pivot between those paradoxes, potentially enabling the community to struggle against political motionlessness while challenging closure. In this regard, political forgiveness, and the acknowledgment of collective responsibility at its core, make way for the community to move *beyond* the tragic conundrums of political action *through* political action and thus, through tragedy itself. Political apology appears as a gesture that contributes to the co-creation of a story of collective responsibility by introducing in the public space multiple stories of responsibility, thus setting the stage for political forgiveness.

Building upon this conceptualization, the thesis seeks to make sense of the Uruguayan “Ceremony of Forgiveness”, in which the President José Mujica acknowledged the state’s responsibility for human rights violations in the “lead years”, that is, right before and during the civic-military dictatorship (1973-1985). Mujica did

this in fulfillment of a sentence imposed on the country by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on February 2011. In order to not fuel antagonisms in the public space, still fractured by the unhealed wounds of the lead years, Mujica chose to deliver a strictly juridical speech focused exclusively on legal responsibility, thus subscribing to a binary narrative of the past that may, paradoxically, fuel those antagonisms. In this regard, I claim that, although Mujica's acknowledgment of the state's responsibility at the "Ceremony" was a major achievement for Uruguayan society, he missed a historic opportunity to question both the idea that past wrongdoings are the consequence of a confrontation between two actors, and that there is a choice to be made between forgetting the past and revisiting it. I refer to these ideas as a binary narrative of the past, and posit a narrative of collective responsibility as its alternative. By broadening the circle of sufferers – in Mujica's case that could have meant stepping out from his institutional role to speak from his personal stories – and by counter-remembering, thus re-evoking the unfinished past suffering in the present, such a narrative provides the grounds to struggle against the irredeemable nature of the grief caused by loss in the aftermath of atrocities, not for the sake of imposing an end on that grief, but for the sake of rekindling political action. Furthermore, the work of counter-remembering evokes a shared sense of loss that founds, paradoxically, a renewed sense of belonging, which nonetheless exists in permanent dialogue with the past. Counter-remembering then becomes a way to re-member the political community, suggesting alternative foundations for the promise of togetherness and inviting the political community to re-imagining itself.

Acknowledgments

Several people made the difference during the journey of writing this dissertation and during my MA. Among them, I would like to sincerely thank Prof. Greg Anderson, for being always ready to provide refreshing insights on academic issues and career goals; Prof. David Kahane, whose teaching was challenging in method and content; and Prof. Robert Nichols, whose classes on Foucault are part of the reason why I would like to become a political theorist.

I would like to acknowledge the unconditional support of my Uruguayan family, ancestors and descendants, whose stories and struggles fill me with pride, and my Canadian family, Marco, my home after I left home.

To my supervisor and mentor, Prof. Roger Epp, *muchas gracias* for your exceptional and constant support throughout this journey. Our conversations were a guide in finding a voice of my own and discovering a place of intellectual belonging. They have renewed my desire to teach.

Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Introduction – A [Uruguayan] Controversy with respect to Political Apology and Forgiveness.....	2
Chapter 1 – Political Apology as a Story of Responsibility.....	26
A. On the components of apology, and its co-creation	27
B. On third parties and political apology.....	32
C. Apologies by proxy, <i>apologos</i> , and collective responsibility.....	36
D. Apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation	41
<i>Interlude 1 – On imagination, the Word, and my abuela Maruja</i>	<i>45</i>
Chapter 2 – Conceptualizing Political Forgiveness	48
A. Forgiveness at the intersection of contingency and unconditionality	49
B. From tragedy to responsibility: political forgiveness as self-reconciliation.....	72
<i>Interlude 2 – The Star of Memory (or how the sky was left without stars).....</i>	<i>92</i>
Chapter 3 – From Mujica’s <i>apologos</i> to the imagined community. Political forgiveness, collective responsibility, and re-membrance	98
A. Behind the scenes of a historic act of acknowledgment	100
B. A historic setting for the madness of the possible... and a broken promise	110
C. “Too horrible to remember, too horrible to forget”: counter-remembering sorrow, re-remembering the community.....	127
<i>Postlude - The story of the beginning</i>	<i>142</i>
References.....	147

“On a spring morning, the carpenter realized that Matryoshka was sad and asked her what was going on. She answered that she would like to have a daughter [...] The carpenter removed the wood and he carved a similar but smaller doll, who he named Tryoshka. Some time after that, Tryoshka too felt the need to be a mother. So the carpenter removed the wood from inside her and he carved an even smaller doll, who he named Oshka. Some time after, his small doll also wanted to have a daughter, but Sergei [the carpenter] knew that there was barely any wood left inside Oshka. [...] he carved a tiny figure, who he named Ka, he painted a moustache, he put him facing the mirror, and said: ‘you are a boy and you cannot have children inside you’. Then he put Ka inside Oshka. Oshka inside Tryoshka and Tryoshka inside Matryoshka. One day, mysteriously, Matryoshka disappeared with all her family inside and Sergei never found her again . . . ”

*“The Legend of Matryosha and her daughters”, Toy Studio Tussilago.
This story is based on the book *Matryoshka*, written by Dimiter Inkiow.*

Introduction

A [Uruguayan] Controversy with respect to Political Apology and Forgiveness

The “Ceremony of Forgiveness”

“The Uruguayan State acknowledges that in the past, actions were committed in the country that violated human rights,” said José Mujica, the current President of Uruguay, in a public act conducted on March 21, 2012.¹ A former *guerrillero* imprisoned for eleven years – two of which he spent confined in the bottom of a well – Mujica is one of the many victims of those “actions that violated human rights” committed under the former Uruguayan dictatorship (1973-1985), which he ended up being mandated, ironically, to acknowledge years later.

Mujica pronounced these words during a ceremony where the Uruguayan state, fulfilling a sentence imposed on February 24, 2011 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights,² publicly acknowledged its responsibility for the enforced disappearance in 1976 of María Claudia García de Gelman – who remains disappeared – and her

1. 2012. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, “Palabras del Presidente Mujica en acto público del 21 de marzo,” official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 21. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/Comunicacion/comunicacionNoticias/discurso-mujica-21-de-marzo>.

2. The Uruguayan state approved the San José de Costa Rica Agreement or American Convention on Human Rights in the Amnesty Law (No. 15.737, March 8, 1985), and it acknowledged the competence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in all cases related to the interpretation or application of the Convention.

daughter, Macarena Gelman, found by her grandfather in 1999, at the age of 23. The ceremony was the first time that a Uruguayan head of state acknowledged in a public speech the state's responsibility for the wrongdoings that occurred under the civic-military dictatorship: "Uruguay, as a state, assumes its international juridical responsibility for the events acknowledged in the Sentence [of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights]. Uruguay also acknowledges its ethical responsibility for those events. In light of this, the state condemns the latter and affirms its commitment to justice and its willingness to prevent similar events from happening again. With this purpose, the state has taken and will keep taking firm steps in order to repair the harm done." President Mujica spoke those words in the main hall of the Legislature, in front of Ministries, representatives of the Uruguayan Supreme Court, the members of the Legislative Power, the Chief Commanders of the Armed Forces and the Chief of the "Estado Mayor de la Defensa" – the authority that advises the Ministry of Defense regarding the planning and coordination of the Armed Forces' activities³ – as well as the Gelman family and ordinary citizens.

During his speech, President Mujica never apologized or asked for forgiveness explicitly on behalf of the Uruguayan state. However, the event is popularly referred to as the "Acto del perdón," literally "Ceremony of forgiveness."⁴ In fact, since Mujica's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luis Almagro, announced in January 2012 that the

3. The "Estado Mayor de la Defensa" (ES.MA.DE.) was created through the Law of National Defense, No. 18.650 of March 8, 2010.

4. According to Mauricio Rabuffetti, journalist and autor of the book *José Mujica: The Quiet Revolution* (2014) [*José Mujica. La revolución tranquila*] who I interviewed for this thesis in November 2014, the name of the event was the result of the political and sentimental appropriation of the act by those who fight for justice and systematic and integral reparation in Uruguay.

government was preparing a public act of reparation to the victims of the dictatorship,⁵ the use of the term “forgiveness” to describe the issue of the act became a source of disagreement among political actors. After having said on March 6, 2012 that the motivation of the ceremony would be “to request forgiveness from all the arrested-disappeared as represented by Macarena and Juan Gelman,”⁶ Almagro refuted his own words and declared that “it is not a ceremony of forgiveness,” but an act of “responsibility of the state for the human rights violations in the aspects considered in the sentence of the Inter-American Court.”⁷ Almagro was, nonetheless, not the only one to be “confused” regarding what was at stake in the ceremony. Mujica himself avoided talking about the ceremony as an act of forgiveness, although he ended up doing so. He opened his speech by declaring: “We have summoned this public act in fulfillment of what the Inter-American Court of Human Rights resolved in its sentence from February 24, 2011, in the case ‘Gelman vs. Uruguay’.” When speaking about the Ceremony he pointed out repeatedly the strictly juridical motivation for the ceremony, whose aim “is nothing else but to comply in good faith with a decision that we must obey. We think that it is neither a decisive date nor anything like that, nor is there a before and an after. It is a juridical obligation of the Uruguayan state before a decision of an organization that we have

5. 2012. Presidencia República oriental del Uruguay, “Uruguay realizará acto reparatorio: ‘pedir perdón’ a las víctimas de la dictadura militar,” official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. January 16. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/comunicacion/comunicacionnoticias/acto-reparacion-victimas-dictadura>.

6. 2012. “Estado pedirá perdón por crímenes de la dictadura,” *Espectador.com*, January 16. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.espectador.com/politica/230753/estado-pedir-perd-n-por-cr-menes-de-la-dictadura>.

7. 2012. “¿Perdón? El discurso del 21 de marzo,” *Montevideo Portal*, March 7. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://www.montevideo.com.uy/notnoticias_162221_1.html.

recognized in that moment.”⁸ However, two weeks before the act, he declared: “I will speak on behalf of the state. I must assume that responsibility. I do not like it at all because forgiveness is a subjective territory of the things that are carried inside.”⁹

Furthermore, political leaders both from the leftist coalition that is currently in office (the Frente Amplio) and the opposition, as well as the Chief Commander of the Army, and Macarena Gelman herself, all referred to the question of forgiveness when consulted about the Ceremony. The Minister of Defense, Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, also a former member of the National Liberation Movement “Tupamaros” (MLN-T), who is particularly close to Mujica both politically and personally, declared in a public act: “Asking forgiveness is easy. There are few people who sign up to forgive. To forgive, this is what is difficult.” And he continued: “I was asked to request forgiveness, but I am told that I will not be forgiven. It is a bit of a stupid thing, is it not? You request forgiveness from me and I will not forgive you, so... go fuck yourself!” Moreover, he expressed that if there were a table at which to request forgiveness, it should include many more actors than the Armed Forces and the former leaders of the MLN-T: “I was invited many times to sit at a table next to the military for both of us to request forgiveness. And I said ‘no, I am sorry: the table has to be very big; no, no, it has to be a big round table’. In a chair me, for the MLN, let’s suppose; another chair for the military, but the Ambassador of the United States has to be there. How would the Russian Ambassador not be there? They should be there. The directors of the newspaper *El País*,

8. 2012. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, “Palabras del Presidente Mujica en acto público del 21 de marzo,” official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 21. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/Comunicacion/comunicacionNoticias/discurso-mujica-21-de-marzo>.

9. Cavallo, Mauricio. 2012. “Mujica quiere a los Comandantes en acto del perdón,” *República.com.uy*, March 5. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.republica.com.uy/mujica-opina/>.

who encouraged the *coup d'état*, they should be there. The big media, the big unions, the traditional parties [referring to the Colorado Party and the National Party¹⁰], they should be there. [...] Because here the idea that only two sit is a rip-off to the people and to the youth, it is to tell the story of the country wrongly.”¹¹

For his part, former president Luis Alberto Lacalle, from the National Party, who did not attend the ceremony, publicly expressed his disagreement with the sentence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, because, according to him, a democratic state should not be asked to assume the responsibility for criminal acts carried out by people who violated the Rule of Law and the Constitution. Lacalle generally seems to accept the idea that a nation can ask for forgiveness, but not that the state representing that nation should assume responsibility for crimes committed in the past using its *apparatus*: “Think about demanding from Germany that it takes the responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Nazis. Some nations, like the one mentioned, have expressed feelings of solidarity with the persecuted, they have asked forgiveness, but they have not assumed the responsibility for the crimes.” With regard to forgiveness in the Uruguayan case, specifically, he stated: “It would be good that once and for all the authorities of the MLN and, if there are, other terrorist groups that attacked the national democracy starting in 1963, request, themselves, forgiveness for the assassinations, kidnappings, and robberies

10. The Colorado Party and the National Party (or White Party) were both created in 1836. Although both parties have represented diverse ideological streams, we could generally say that the Colorado Party has historically brought together moderate and liberal groups and the National Party has represented conservative interests, particularly those of the big farmers. The coup d'état of 1973, which marks the beginning of the dictatorship, was carried out by the then President of the country, who belonged to the Colorado Party, with the support of the Armed Forces.

11. Fernández, Hugo. 2012. “El perdón de Fernández Huidobro,” *El Diario*, March 29. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://eldiario.com.uy/2012/03/29/el-perdon-de-fernandez-huidobro/>.

that they committed, and return the money that is still in their hands.”¹² The same opinion was expressed by former president Jorge Batlle, from the Colorado Party. “Here those who should ask forgiveness are those who messed things up, who doubts it? If there had not been a guerrilla movement, there would not have been a military dictatorship.”¹³

The Chief Commander of the Army, Pedro Aguerre, for his part, while he expressed that he was ready to attend the ceremony if he was invited – he actually attended it – made a distinction between a request for forgiveness and an apology. According to the newspaper publishing his declarations, *Ultimas Noticias*, the Chief Commander of the Army “gave the example of someone who drives a vehicle, crosses a cross-walk at 180 km per hour, kills a person, and then asks for forgiveness.” “It is to act from weakness and it is useless. It is not the same if one goes at 5 km per hour and the other person throw herself in front of the car. Forgiveness is requested for the responsibility that may exist,” said Aguerre. While he associated an apology with the assumption of responsibility, he associated forgiveness with weakness: “I do not use the word ‘forgiveness’, it is about apology because requesting forgiveness from weakness is not to request forgiveness.” Aguerre also stated that the apology was to be issued by his

12. 2012. “Para Lacalle, ‘sería bueno’ que MLN y ‘grupos terroristas’ pidan perdón,” *El Observador*, March 23. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.elobservador.com.uy/noticia/221006/para-lacalle-seria-bueno-que-mln-y-grupos-terroristas-pidan-perdon/>.

13. Cajal, Martín. 2012. “Batlle: perdón que pidan ‘los que armaron en lío’,” *El Diario*, March 15. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://eldiario.com.uy/2012/03/15/batlle-perdon-que-pidan-los-que-armaron-el-lio/>.

“bosses”: “the ones who apologize are the bosses and my bosses are the President of the Republic and the Minister of Defense.”¹⁴

Macarena Gelman, born in 1976, while her mother was in captivity and her father had already been murdered, said that she did not consider Mujica’s government act to be a ceremony of forgiveness: “I have not seen any remorse on the part of those who carried out these horrors, and thus a ceremony of forgiveness would not make sense.” She also expressed that the public ceremony of March 21 could not possibly be a ceremony of forgiveness, because – similarly to what Mujica expressed – forgiveness is voluntary and individual.¹⁵

At first sight, the “Ceremony of forgiveness” and its repercussions put into evidence two features of the Uruguayan public space. Firstly, the idea of apology and especially the idea of forgiveness arise spontaneously among citizens, in spite of the intentions of some political actors to keep these ideas – or at least the words that represent them – out of the public realm. Secondly, the notions of apology and forgiveness are a matter of controversy among political actors, who grant relevance to those notions by participating in the public exchange of arguments about what these notions mean and what their place is with regard to the wrongdoings committed during the dictatorship. Why is forgiveness (and to a lesser extent, apology) regarding past misdeeds, such a controversial issue in the Uruguayan political space? What is it about it that makes political actors so uncomfortable, and leads them to erratic public

14. 2012. “Aguerre cree que corresponde al Estado pedir disculpas,” *Ultimas Noticias*, March 6. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.uy/Edicion-UN/articulos/prints-2012mar06/act03.html>.

15. 2012. “Macarena Gelman: ‘no tendría sentido un acto de perdón’,” *El Observador*, March 5. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.elobservador.com.uy/noticia/219916/macarena-gelman-no-tendria-sentido-un-acto-de-perdon/>.

declarations? In order to further this first approach, the next section will provide insight into the longer context in which the “Ceremony” took place.

The context of the “Ceremony of Forgiveness”: apology and forgiveness in the Uruguayan post-dictatorial public space

A significant part of the past three decades of Uruguayan history – including Mujica’s speech – can be interpreted in terms of the struggles among social and political actors to support or modify the juridical contract that emerged at the end of the civic-military dictatorship, whose cornerstones were the Amnesty Law and the Law on the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State [Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado]. The Amnesty Law (No. 15.737, March 8, 1985) granted amnesty for all political crimes committed since January 1st, 1962, including those carried out by members of the main revolutionary movement, the MLN-T, and excluding those committed by military and police officers responsible or co-responsible for “inhuman, cruel or degrading treatment or for the detention of people who were later disappeared” (5th article). One year after the passing of the Amnesty Law, the Law on the Expiration of the Punitive Claims of the State (LEPCS) (No. 15.848, December 22, 1986) extended the amnesty to military and police officers potentially involved in crimes against humanity.

There were several attempts to reform the juridical contract established in the LEPCS. Two of these took the form of popular consultations: a referendum in 1989, aiming to revoke the law; and a plebiscite in 2009, aiming to partially annul the law through a constitutional amendment. People were asked to vote either for or against

revocation in the first case, and for partial annulment in the second case. The referendum result was 57% against the revocation of the law and 43% in favor, while in the plebiscite, almost 48% of the citizenry voted for the partial annulation of the law, but at least 50% of votes were necessary for the partial amendment to be passed. Both initiatives failed, and both times the small difference between those supporting the proposed transformations of the law and those either explicitly opposing those transformations (referendum) or not willing to support them (plebiscite) put into evidence the deep fractures of the Uruguayan society regarding how to reckon with its past.

In the midst of these social fractures, heads of state have carried out different actions to deal with past human rights violations. In an attempt to support the post-dictatorship juridical contract while facing the social demands for truth and justice, President Jorge Batlle established in 2000 the “Commission for Peace” whose members were representatives of the country’s political, social, and religious actors. The aim of this commission was strictly investigative and reparatory. It furthered the application of article 4 of the LEPCS – according to which the state should carry out investigations to clarify past events involving human rights violations¹⁶ – without ever putting into question the state’s refusal to judge and punish wrongdoers, also established in the LEPCS. The Commission for Peace made significant contributions in the search for the remains of victims of forced disappearance, although it was expected to contribute more than it did.

16. *Article 4* -. Notwithstanding the provisions of the preceding Articles, the trial judge shall transmit to the Executive Branch testimony of complaints filed to the date of enactment of this Act relating to proceedings concerning persons reportedly detained in military or police operations and missing children allegedly abducted under similar conditions.

The Executive Branch shall immediately undertake research aimed to investigate these events. The Executive Power within one hundred twenty days of judicial communication of the complaint shall advise the complainant of the outcome of these investigations and it shall disclose the information gathered.

President Tabaré Vázquez, the first head of state belonging to the “Frente Amplio,”¹⁷ the national leftist coalition, apart from continuing with the aim to further article 4 of the LEPCS, decreed in 2005 that the LEPCS did not apply to around fifty cases of people reported as disappeared (among them, the Gelmans’ case) – this, having always declared himself against the annulment of the LEPCS. As the President whose term in office followed Batlle’s, and also the modest results of the Commission for Peace, Vázquez carried out successive decrees that enabled the Judicial Power to accuse, judge and imprison some of the major perpetrators of human rights violations during the lead years. In 2007, Vázquez proposed a legal project of reparation that aimed at compensating the families of the victims of the guerrilla movement– including police officers and soldiers killed in confrontations with the *guerrilleros* – as well as the families of twenty-six victims of enforced disappearance by the state. The law was not passed by the Parliament, and faced resistance from different sectors of the leftist coalition as well as by the human rights movement in general, who criticized the project for equating the victims of state terrorism with the victims of the so-called “seditious” by the military. Also, at the end of Vázquez’s term in office, a law of reparation (No. 18.596, September 18, 2009) was passed. The first two articles of the law explicitly acknowledged the state’s responsibility for the human rights violations committed between 1968 and 1985, establishing financial compensations for the victims of state terrorism.¹⁸ Although this was not the first law of reparations for victims of wrongdoings

17. The Frente Amplio (“Broad Front” in English) is a center-left coalition created in 1971, which has been in power since 2005.

18. *Article 1* - Hereby recognized the violation of the rule of law that would prevent the exercise of fundamental rights to the people, in violation of human rights or the rules of international humanitarian law, in the period from June 27, 1973 until February 28, 1985. *Article 2* - Responsibility of the Uruguayan State is recognized in conducting systematic practice of torture, enforced disappearances and imprisonment

committed during the dictatorship, it is the first one acknowledging the “illegitimate action of the state” (article 5) and addressed towards compensating the victims of state terrorism at large – not just those who were affected as public or private workers or businessmen.¹⁹ Moreover, this is the first reparatory law including the abuses committed previous to the coup d’état, since it covers the period between 1968 and 1985. I will refer henceforth to this period of Uruguayan history as the “lead years”, which is how it is frequently referred to by the Uruguayan people.

In October 2011, the struggles of more than two decades around the post-dictatorship juridical order reached a peak with the reestablishment of the state’s punitive claims for the crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship. Law No. 18.831 (October 27, 2011) was passed in the Parliament with the votes of the leftist majority, reforming a contract that the citizenry decided to not modify twice, in 1989 and 2009. A historic achievement of the Uruguayan human rights movement, the “Interpretative Law of the LEPCS” established the imprescriptibility of crimes against humanity, such as those committed by the state during the dictatorship. Specifically, it “reestablished the full exercise of the punitive claims of the state for crimes committed through state terrorism until the 1st of March, 1985, included in article 1 of the Law No. 15.848, from December 22, 1986 [the LEPCS]”. The opposition asked the President to veto the Interpretative Law. Despite disagreeing with the cancellation of the LEPCS because it was ratified twice by the Uruguayan people Mujica refused to veto the

without intervention of the judiciary, killings, destruction of people in their physical and psychological integrity, political exile or banishment from the social life, in the period from June 13, 1968 until June 26, 1973, marked by the systematic application of Prompt Security Measures and inspired by the ideological framework of the National Security Doctrine.

19. There are elements of reparatory justice in the Amnesty Law No. 15.737 (March, 8, 1985), the law No. 15.783 (November, 28, 1985), the law No. 17.449 (January, 4, 2002), and the law No. 18.033 (October, 13, 2006), among others.

Interpretative Law, due to his general reluctance to resort to presidential veto. In February 2013, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional articles 2 and 3 of the Interpretative Law – those referring to the imprescriptibility of the crimes against humanity carried out until the 1st of March, 1985 – arguing that penal crimes cannot be judged retroactively.²⁰ Since the Supreme Court’s controversial declaration of unconstitutionality in February 2013, the state has continued to conduct investigative actions to shed light on the whereabouts of people disappeared and murdered by the dictatorship, other members of the Armed Forces were investigated for perpetrating human rights violations, and the Supreme Court declared the unconstitutionality of the Interpretative Law for another case.

Former president Julio María Sanguinetti, who was one of the main actors involved in the elaboration and passing of the Law of Amnesty and the LEPCS, declared in 2012: “In those days [referring to the days of the 1989 plebiscite on the LEPCS] a lot was said about forgiveness, but what matters is not the forgiveness that is requested, but the forgiveness that is granted, and the Uruguayan society has forgiven. It forgave the *Tupamaros*, the proof is that they are in the government, and it forgave the military twice [referring to the 1989 plebiscite and the 2009 referendum on the LEPCS].”²¹ Sanguinetti assumes that both the lack of success of the two initiatives to partially and totally revoke the LEPCS and the fact that former members of the MLN-T have increasingly been in official positions since 2005 (with the first Frente Amplio’s government under President

20. In the Uruguayan legal system, the Supreme Court can only declare the unconstitutionality of a law for a particular case, not in general, so the fact that the Interpretative Law was declared unconstitutional for a particular case in February 2013 does not mean that the same will apply in the future for other cases. However, it is a precedent and may be cited as the foundation for a similar verdict.

21. Tagliaferro, Gerardo, 2012. “Julio María Sanguinetti canta ‘las 40’. Confesiones de invierno,” *Montevideo Portal*, April 9. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://www.montevideo.com.uy/ucnoticias_164358_1.html.

Tabaré Vázquez) are tantamount to forgiveness among Uruguayan people regarding the crimes of the dictatorial period. Considering the opinions expressed in the past fifteen years by different political actors – from civil society to religious, military, and party leaders – about the idea of forgiveness and the human rights violations during the authoritarian period, however, Sanguinetti’s view seems to be, at least, questionable.

A sign that Uruguayan society has not forgiven – or at least not everyone has – is the historical *leitmotiv* of the human rights movement: “Neither forgetfulness nor forgiveness: truth and justice”. The same leitmotiv can be found across South American human rights movements. It is evidence that at least for a significant part of civil society, forgiveness is undesirable and moreover, it is something to fight against, because it is at odds with memory and justice.

In 2000, few days after Jorge Batlle’s inauguration as president, a public exchange of opinions took place regarding the idea of forgiveness for crimes committed during the lead years. In his inaugural speech, Batlle stated his intentions to unveil the truth about the whereabouts of victims of enforced disappearance in the context of the authoritarian government. "If we have gone through so many things and we have suffered so many things, and none of us can say that someone is guilty or that someone is innocent, and thus this is not the result of a Manichaeian world of evil against good, the first responsibility of all of us is to seal peace for ever among Uruguayans."²² Only a few days later, a weekly newspaper published declarations from the then Chief of the “Estado

22. “Texto de la alocución de Jorge Batlle ante la Asamblea General del Poder Legislativo,” *Espectador.com*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.espectador.com/text/documentos/doc03012.htm>.

Mayor Conjunto de la Defensa,” General Manuel Fernández.²³ According to the newspaper, General Fernández affirmed that “‘sooner or later we will need to fight again’ against ‘the internal enemy’ (which is the left) since ‘they have not stopped their fight’.”²⁴ He reiterated this opinion the day after on the radio, and President Batlle discharged him from his position, and penalized him with fifteen days of imprisonment in a military unit.²⁵ Batlle’s intentions, expressed in his inaugural speech, in addition to his attitude towards General Fernández, triggered among the upper military ranks a feeling of discomfort. This feeling is visible in the opinion of former Chief Commander of the Army, retired General Raúl Mermot, expressed in a tribute to military and police officers killed during the ‘60s and the ‘70s,²⁶ Mermot said that the Armed Forces should “always be alert and expectant” regarding Batlle’s policy about disappeared people.²⁷ Another retired general, Iván Paulós, former Chief of the Intelligence Service during the civic-military government, in declarations to a newspaper about the 60’s and the 70’s, referred to former members of the guerilla movement as “prominent terrorists of that time, who

23. The “Estado Mayor Conjunto de la Defensa” (ES.MA.CO.) was the combined command of the Armed Forces that carried out the counterinsurgency operations against the guerrilla of the *Tupamaros*.

24. Rodríguez, Pablo. “El Jefe del Ejército amenazó a la izquierda; Batlle lo destituyó. El regreso de los muertos vivos en Uruguay,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-07/pag03.htm>.

25. This is a type of sanction included in the disciplinary regulations for members of the Armed Forces. The time of imprisonment can go up to 60 days.

26. Raúl Mermot was the president of the Military Centre, which is an association uniting both retired and current members of the military. In Uruguay, members of the Armed Forces cannot engage in any sort of political activity, even when they are retired, except for voting – they are for instance forbidden to form unions. In this context, the public declarations of those leading this club, as well as those leading the Military Circle, whose members are exclusively retired officers, is generally seen by the public as expressing the political position of a substantial portion of both current and retired members of the Armed Forces.

27. “El Presidente uruguayo respondió a dos militares. Batlle contra los dinosaurios,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-15/pag19a.htm>.

still are terrorists spiritually, now with legislative titles.”²⁸ And, specifically regarding forgiveness, he argued: “The Armed Forces do not have to request forgiveness from anyone, because when you save your homeland, there is no forgiveness to be requested. War is violence and violence always falls on both sides, but it seems that here the only victims are on the side of the subversion. It seems that the other men do not suffer and the families of other men do not suffer.”²⁹

In response to these declarations coming from highly ranked current and former members of the military, President Batlle expressed an idea that he also advanced in his inaugural speech: “to a greater or lesser extent we all have responsibilities in what happened, and therefore, who has to assume them on behalf of all of us is not someone in particular, not even – even less – a sector of society. It is the state in representation of the society.”³⁰ It is interesting that this is the same actor that twelve years later, when asked about the Ceremony of Forgiveness, answered that those who should request forgiveness are those who “started the problem”, namely, according to him in these declarations, the MLN-T. Current President, José Mujica, who was then a Senator, expressed that he was ready to request forgiveness if all actors involved in past wrongdoings did. In this regard, the then Minister of Defense, Luis Brezzo, suggested, “if everybody has to ask for forgiveness, then nobody should. The idea of asking for forgiveness does not match the

28. Iván Paulós was the president of the Military Centre at multiple times.

29. “El Presidente uruguayo respondió a dos militares. Batlle contra los dinosaurios,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-15/pag19a.htm>.

30. “Texto de la alocución de Jorge Batlle ante la Asamblea General del Poder Legislativo,” *Espectador.com*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.espectador.com/text/documentos/doc03012.htm>.

Uruguayan character. It is almost an act of humiliation. I do not share this idea. I think that forgiveness is not to be asked from anyone.”³¹

At the same time as this episode took place, at the beginnings of Batlle’s term in office and in the process of settling the Commission for Peace, General Líber Seregni, twice a presidential candidate for the Frente Amplio, stated in a couple of interviews that “institutions do not ask for forgiveness, and consequently, the Army, which is an institution, does not ask for forgiveness.”³² “I understand that forgiveness is an individual act”, so “nobody can ask the Army to request forgiveness,” he said. “Those who must request forgiveness are those who committed aberrant crimes.”³³

In an interview in September 2006, the then Chief Commander of the Air Force in Tabaré Vázquez’s office, Lieutenant General Enrique Bonelli, expressed that the speech he gave on March 17, 2005, on the Day of the Air Force, was a “strong way” to request forgiveness, but that “no one” understood it, because there were “radical sectors” who wanted to “humiliate” the Armed Forces. Bonelli expressed in his speech that the Air Force supported “with the greatest effort” President Vázquez’s decision to work toward the clarification of “the difficult moments that our country lived more than three decades ago”³⁴ – that is, Vázquez’s decision to investigate the whereabouts of the disappeared

31. “El Presidente uruguayo respondió a dos militares. Batlle contra los dinosaurios,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-15/pag19a.htm>.

32. Líber Seregni was one of the main founders of the leftist coalition “Frente Amplio”. He was imprisoned between 1973 and 1984, and proscribed in the elections that marked the restoration of democracy, in 1984.

33. “Neber Araújo, en nota con el Gral. Líber Seregni Parte 3.” Accessed December 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3Ega2Krp90>.

34. 2005. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, Recording of Lieutenant General Bonelli’s speech on the Day of the Air Force, archive of recordings of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 17. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/Web/audionet/2005/03/03_2005.htm

people and their remains. “I said there [at the speech on the Day of the Air Force] that we should not have done this [referring to the Armed Forces’ past misdeeds] and that these things should not happen again”, affirmed Bonelli. He also expressed that “there are many ways” to request forgiveness: “I did not say ‘forgive us’, but I said it in my way”, he declared. “But if what we look for today is ‘I want that he asks for forgiveness’ and I say ‘I am very sorry’ or ‘I truly would not have wanted to harm you in any way’, [and the response is] ‘ask me for forgiveness, you have to kneel and ask me for forgiveness’, this no [he does not accept it].”³⁵

In his 2006 Christmas message, Archbishop of Montevideo, Nicolás Cotugno, former member of the Commission for Peace, affirmed: “In our country we are very far from the so desired reconciliation between the civic-military authorities of the dictatorship and the relatives of disappeared people.” In his speech, he mentioned as exemplary the story of the mother of an Argentinian victim of state terrorism who, in the murderer’s trial, forgave him. According to the newspaper *El País*, Cotugno said that “the story of this mother who was capable of forgiving the murderer of her son’ should serve ‘as an example to all without exceptions’ to ‘decisively close the wounds of the past’ and leave behind ‘the effects of the time when we were devastated by intolerance and terrorism in its multiple sorts’.” He also expressed that justice is necessary and requires forgiveness: “there is no peace without justice, there is no justice without forgiveness,” he said. “The exercise of justice reestablishes the balance of the violated human rights. To request forgiveness tends to bring peace to the offender. To grant

35. Risso, Elena. 2006 “‘No sé cuando tendrán fin’ los reclamos,” *El País digital*, September 14. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/06/09/14/pnacio_237092.asp.

forgiveness tends to give back to victims the peace that has been stolen from them by the offenders.”³⁶

In 2006, the then President of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, decreed June 19 – the birthday of the Uruguayan national hero, José Gervasio Artigas³⁷ – as the “Day of Never Again”: “That day, which is a day of encounter of the majority of the Uruguayans with their roots, must also be a day of commitment for facts of intolerance and violence among Uruguayan citizens to never happen again.”³⁸ This decree caused a great deal of controversy: it was well received by the military and rejected by multiple sectors of the leftist coalition. In this regard, Rafael Michelini, a current senator for the Frente Amplio, declared in 2007: “Who is the Chief Commander who will make history in Uruguay? The one who requests forgiveness from the victims, the one who condemns the facts, the one who says that there cannot be state terrorism ever again, the one who commits the Army to never again use weapons against the people of this country.”³⁹ ⁴⁰

36. 2006. “Cotugno pide que familiares de víctimas concedan el ‘perdón,’” *El País digital*. December 23. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/06/12/23/pnacio_254977.asp.

37. Artigas fought for the independence of Uruguay from Spain and Portugal.

38. 2006. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, “Vázquez: Día del Nunca Más no es un punto final,” official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. December 26. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/web/noticias/2006/12/2006122603.htm>.

39. Rafael Michelini’s father, Zelmar Michelini, was a Uruguayan senator for the Colorado Party first and the Frente Amplio next, tortured and murdered in 1976 in Buenos Aires as part of “Operation Condor” or the “Condor Plan”. The latter was a coordinated program of repression conducted in the ’70s and ’80s by the governments of Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, and Bolivia against the guerrilla. Zelmar Michelini’s body was found next to that of Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz, a Uruguayan deputy for the National Party, and those of William Whitelaw and Rosario del Carmen Barredo, members of the MLN-T, who also were victims of torture and assassination.

40. Pippo, Antonio. 2007. “El comandante que pasará a la historia será el que le pida perdón a las víctimas,” *La Red 21*. June 11. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.lr21.com.uy/politica/261470-el-comandante-que-pasara-a-la-historia-sera-el-que-le-pida-perdon-a-las-victimas>.

The idea of a “Day of Never Again” was welcomed by some people for the same reasons for which it was rejected by others: it was interpreted as equating the actions of those who fought in the *guerilla* movement with the actions of state terrorism. In 2007, for the first commemoration of the “Day of Never Again”, Vázquez promoted a civic-military parade, from which he ended up refraining due to the resistance it awoke among the members of his own party – the Frente Amplio – and several social organizations. Vázquez then made new declarations about the meaning of the “Day of Never Again” in which he explicitly condemned state terrorism: “Never again violent confrontations among Uruguayans; never again disqualifications or violence among us; never again mistrust, never again intolerance, never again discrimination, never again inequity in the opportunities, never again poverty, never again state terrorism.”⁴¹ After these declarations, the majority of the leftist party supported the President in his initiative to celebrate the “Day of Never Again”, and the associations of current and retired members of the Armed Forces (the Military Centre and Military Circle) withdrew their support.⁴²

In 2008, Vázquez had meetings with retired members of the military and former members of the MLN-T – many of whom had positions in the government – in order for them to publicly acknowledge their responsibility in past wrongdoings. Vázquez expressed that the government’s intention with those meetings – as with the “Day of Never Again” – was not to promote the closure of past events, but to build bridges within

41. Nicrossi, Loreley. 2007. “19 de junio. Día del nunca más. Factor de división y polémica,” *El País* digital. June 17. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/07/06/17/pnacio_286796.asp.

42. Nicrossi, Loreley. 2007. “19 de junio. Día del nunca más. Factor de división y polémica,” *El País* digital. June 17. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/07/06/17/pnacio_286796.asp.

society regarding past scars. “What we are doing from the government, and I in particular, from the beginning of my time in office, is to look for a path of encounter without forgetting the past, without suggesting an end point, which we have never suggested.”⁴³ Vázquez’s initiative to promote a joint acknowledgment on the part of retired military and former *guerrilleros* again brought the issue of forgiveness into the public realm, and again in a controversial fashion. Among the members of the leftist party, there were multiple expressions of disagreement with the President’s initiative to have retired military and former *guerrilleros* sitting at the same table to acknowledge their responsibilities in past events. In fact, Vázquez’s idea was interpreted by many in the leftist coalition as validating the “theory of the two demons”, a narrative about the Latin American dictatorial regimes of the 1970s according to which the actions of guerrilla movements are morally equivalent to the actions of state terrorism.⁴⁴ “One thing is violence and another thing is the right of peoples to choose the methods for their liberation. These are different things. The President is wrong. This [referring to Vázquez’s initiative to have former MLN-T members and retired member of the military acknowledging their responsibilities for past wrongdoings] would be like asking the old Artigas that he request forgiveness from the Spanish people who died when he fought,”

43. 2008. “Tabaré Vázquez de gira. Ni olvido ni perdón,” *Montevideo Portal*. June 16. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://www.montevideo.com.uy/noticias_63830_1.html.

44. This narrative first appeared in the Argentinian post-dictatorial political discourse, in 1983, and then in the post-dictatorial political discourse of some Uruguayan leaders – for instance, the former President Julio María Sanguinetti, who was a key negotiator of the transition from the dictatorial to the democratic regime in 1984, and then became the head of state in 1985 and again in 1995. In general, those who endorse this narrative claim that: 1) the responsibility for the actions of the lead years belongs to two actors, two “demons”; 2) the actions of state terrorism were a response to the violent actions of the revolutionary groups. According to Alfonso (2012), author of the book *The two demons*, in the Uruguayan example the “two demons” are clearly identifiable: “the leaders of the National Liberation Movement – Tupamaros (MLN-T) on the one hand, and the military (both combatants as well as the small group of those considered to have conceived of the coup d’état of June 27, 1973), on the other hand” (6).

said the representative and former *Tupamaro*, Esteban Pérez.⁴⁵ Senator Rafael Michelini, mentioned above, also associated Vázquez's initiative with the idea behind the theory of the two demons, and declared: "Those who should request forgiveness are those who carried out state terrorism, those who killed, those who tortured, those who kidnapped and disappeared people. The victims of dictatorship and the perpetrators (...) are well differentiated."⁴⁶

Moreover, in general, Vázquez's initiative to have both military officials and former *guerrilleros* acknowledge their responsibility in past events was resisted within the leftist coalition because by the time the President promoted these meetings, the investigations to find out about the remains of victims of enforced disappearance during the dictatorship were stuck, due to the lack of new clues from the military to carry the investigations forward. The retired military officials invited to acknowledge their responsibility in the events of the lead years, for their part, resisted the President's initiative as a reaction against the struggles of the human rights social movement to reform the LEPCS. It was also a reaction against another element of the context: by that time, the Uruguayan state was undertaking the prosecution and imprisonment of military perpetrators of human rights violations during the dictatorship, and the extradition of some of them to be judged in other countries which, like Uruguay, participated in "Operation Condor". For instance, the then President of the Military Centre, General Luis Pérez (currently retired), expressed that "while there are members of the military in

45. Nicosi, Loreley. 2008. "Reconciliación: el Frente le da la espalda a Vázquez," *El País digital*. June 15. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/08/06/15/pnacio_352181.asp.

46. Nicosi, Loreley. 2008. "Reconciliación: el Frente le da la espalda a Vázquez," *El País digital*. June 15. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/08/06/15/pnacio_352181.asp.

prison, or extraditions to Chile, it is unclear what the [President's] proposal is about.”⁴⁷

Pírez also expressed, regarding Vázquez's initiative, that “maybe it works” and there is a “mutual acknowledgment”, but he stressed that it had to be mutual.⁴⁸

Some thoughts on the “Ceremony of Forgiveness”

As shown in the previous section, the “Ceremony” in 2012 was not the first time after the dictatorship in which the matter of reckoning with the past and particularly the issue of forgiveness divided Uruguayan society. In this regard, it was not the first time that the topic of forgiveness emerged in public debate. The “Ceremony” brought back to the public discussion issues that emerged in the episodes described in this section, such as the question of which actors should be involved in requesting or granting forgiveness, the relationship of forgiveness with apology, responsibility, and closure and forgetfulness, and the role that political leaders and specifically, heads of state, have to play in those questions.

Although the “Ceremony” has a lot in common with other episodes that took place in the Uruguayan public realm regarding acknowledgment of state responsibility and forgiveness, it is peculiar in two regards, which motivate and inform this work.

Firstly, the entire public act was presented as taking place strictly as the result of a juridical international mandate. Although there are many examples in the world of public

47. Summary of press news from the Ministry of Defense. Accessed August 3, 2014.
<http://www.mdn.gub.uy/public/admdoc/34c86c2be68c942707595ab93f7a9966/resprenac130608.pdf>.

48. Summary of press news from the Ministry of Defense. Accessed August 3, 2014.
<http://www.mdn.gub.uy/public/admdoc/34c86c2be68c942707595ab93f7a9966/resprenac130608.pdf>.

gestures of apology issued by heads of state, it is certainly peculiar for a state to acknowledge responsibility in front of the national political community for violations of human rights by mandate of an international court. Perhaps because the public act was a consequence of a legal sentence by an international court in a particular case, Mujica was the first Uruguayan President to acknowledge the state's responsibility for past wrongdoings in a public speech. Although all the other post-dictatorship heads of state made public declarations about the unhealed wounds of the recent past, and particularly about the state's responsibility for these wounds and the issue of forgiveness in Uruguayan society, until Mujica none of them did so in a public act while being the head of government. At the same time, during his speech, Mujica stressed time and again that the reason for the act was the sentence issued by the Commission, largely resorting to a purely juridical vocabulary. Why did Mujica choose on the one hand to be a transgressor, breaking the pattern of the heads of state that preceded him by verbally acknowledging the state's responsibility for the events of the lead years and speaking publicly about forgiveness, and on the other hand, adhering to protocol by sticking to a minimalist, carefully planned, legally-oriented speech?

Secondly, the person delivering the speech had a double, *voire* triple status: as the President he is the representative of all Uruguayans and the Uruguayan state, but as an individual he is a former *guerrillero*, and at the same time a victim of state terrorism and a leader of a movement that was involved in acts of political violence. Like a tragic hero, during the "Ceremony of Forgiveness" Mujica was representing the state whose actions he suffered (and was therefore assuming responsibility on behalf of his perpetrator), the same state whose authority he sought to put into question decades ago. Could the

President have given his speech and then stepped out from his institutional role to express remorse for his own actions as a guerrilla leader, or forgiveness as a victim of state terrorism, or both, without falling into the “theory of the two demons”? Could he have broadened the circle of victims and transcended the exercise of contained remembering, addressing some of the gaps existing in collective memory?

Chapter 1

Political Apology as a Story of Responsibility

This thesis is a reconsideration of the phenomena of political apology and forgiveness as they have been framed in recent years in Uruguay but also in a growing social scientific literature.

While the topic of forgiveness has been under-theorized in the field of political philosophy, the notion of apology has been widely explored in a broad body of literature in political sociology, covering both the theorization of gestures of apology and the examination of concrete examples, both at an interpersonal and a collective level. Moreover, the concept of forgiveness appears often associated with that of apology. Despite its contributions to understanding the issues surrounding political forgiveness and apology, there are also multiple gaps in that literature, especially regarding the treatment of political apologies, that is, apologies involving nation-states, issued by political leaders. As a way to address those gaps, the following pages suggest an approach to political apology as a story or a set of stories of responsibility told publicly and co-created by the various actors involved.

This chapter, then, explores the literature on apology and its limitations, and concludes by offering an alternative reading of political apology as story – one that relates to the idea of collective responsibility. Chapter 2 tackles the literature on forgiveness. Drawing on the contributions of Hannah Arendt, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Jacques Derrida, as well as on some insights from Hegel, this chapter outlines an approach to political forgiveness as the call to act politically in the aftermath of major

wrongdoings by building upon the tragic conundrums of action in *post*-political-violence scenarios to challenge tragedy, but also closure. Chapter 3 is devoted to making sense of the events described in the Introduction, specifically, of Mujica's speech in the "Ceremony of Forgiveness". I will argue that Mujica missed a historic opportunity to introduce an alternative narrative about the past. I advance the idea that, by broadening the circle of sufferers and by counter-remembering suffering, a non-binary narrative of collective responsibility has the ability to re-member the community, suggesting alternative foundations for the promise of togetherness and inviting the political community to re-imagine itself. Overall, this work aims at making sense of the phenomenon of political forgiveness, shedding light on its peculiarity and promise, while suggesting a possible orientation for the struggles of the political community in the aftermath of major political violence.

A. On the components of apology, and its co-creation

There is general agreement among the most commonly cited authors on the topic of apology (Goffman 1971; Tavuchis 1991; Lazare 2004) regarding the basic components of a full apology. Typically, "'apology' refers to an encounter between two parties in which one party, the offender, acknowledges responsibility for an offense or grievance and expresses regret or remorse to a second party, the aggrieved" (Lazare 2004, 23). This delimitation of the concept suggests, firstly, that apology occurs between two "co-participants" (Tavuchis 1991, 45). In *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and*

Reconciliation (1991) – one of the more cited works in the study of apology in social sciences – Tavuchis states that “whatever the actual or conceptual status of the relevant units (individuals, corporate entities, or collectivities), *the fundamental pattern of sociation in apologetic discourse is dyadic*” (46).¹ Secondly, acknowledgment and regret (or remorse) are presented as the key elements of an apology. Acknowledgment is broadly understood as the act of recognizing one’s responsibility in an offense, through which one recognizes the other as an offended party, showing respect for her (Thompson 2010). Remorse is conceptualized by Lazare (2004) as “the deep, painful regret that is part of the guilt people experience when they have done something wrong” (107). According to the same author, “to feel remorse for an action is to accept responsibility for the harm caused by it” (107-108). It seems therefore that an apology amounts first and foremost to the act of taking responsibility for a misdeed, given that both the essential components of an apology are tied to responsibility.

Considering the essential role of the acknowledgment of responsibility in apology, there is consensus also regarding what an authentic apology should not consist of: an account of one’s misdeed, that is, a justification or an excuse. In Tavuchis’ words (1991),

When we resort to excuse, explanation, or justification, we necessarily attempt to distance ourselves from our actions and our unique personal identities. We deny or suspend the imperatives of responsibility and answerability.

An apology, in contrast, requires *not* detachment but acknowledgment and painful embracement of our deeds. (19)

Although self-defense, in the form of an explanation of one’s wrong behavior, may be included in a statement of apology – indeed, this is what the Greek word

1. Emphasis is Tavuchis’.

*apologia*² signifies (Negash, 2006) – a statement based on excuses, where the offender indulges in self-victimization or minimizes the offense, would be categorized as a “pseudo-apology” (Lazare, 2004) or even a “non-apology” (Eisinger, 2011). “One who apologizes seeks forgiveness and redemption for what is unreasonable, unjustified, undeserving, and inequitable,” says Tavuchis (1991, 17). Therefore, if the offense for which the offender apologizes can be effectively justified, it should not make the object of an apology. Moreover, Tavuchis points out that an apologetic speech is ineffective when its function is to demonstrate the speaker’s power, including when an apology’s unique goal is to fulfill obligations:

Apology cannot come about and do its work under conditions where the primary function of speech is defensive or purely instrumental and where legalities take precedence over moral imperatives. Once apology is defined as merely a pawn or a gambit in a power game, it becomes part of another moral economy in which individuals or nations find little to be gained. (62)

Apart from acknowledgment and regret, some approaches to the issue of apology include among its components “either an offer of reparations or an assurance that the offense will not be committed again” (Eisenger 2011, 136). Following Tavuchis (1991) and Lazare (2004), the essence of apology lies neither in the possibility of compensation and/or restitution offered by reparations – even if reparations are necessary for the sake of justice – nor in the promise that the offense will not be committed again:

What is critical, I would argue, is the very act of apology itself rather than the offering of material or symbolic restitution (we cannot undo what has been done, only erase it by seeking forgiveness) or the pledge not to err again (since our actions were unaccountable, this burden would have to be borne by the expression of regret lest it sounds hollow or duplicitous). (Tavuchis 1991, 22)

2. Interestingly, while the modern connotation of the word apology rules out defense and excuse, this was precisely the meaning of it in earlier times (Negash, 2006).

While Tavuchis' (1991) conceptualization of apology provides interesting insights on the topic, the justification he provides for leaving restitution out of the conceptualization of what the core of apology is, particularly the idea that the fault may be erased by seeking forgiveness, is highly controversial. I will come back to this statement in the third section of this chapter. The justification I subscribe to is the one provided by Goffman (1971), who points out that an apology aims to indicate a right relationship – that is, a relationship according to the rule that was transgressed – and not to compensate a loss through restitution:

After an offense has occurred, the job of the offender is to show that it was not a fair expression of his attitude, or, when it evidently was, to show that he has changed his attitude to the rule that was violated. In the latter case, his job is to show that whatever happened before, he now has a right relationship – a pious attitude – to the rule in question, and this is a matter of indicating a relationship, not compensating a loss. (118)

To compensate a loss means to restore the situation in which the parties were before the injustice was committed (Thompson 2010). In Tavuchis' (1991) terms, it aims to “undo what has been done” (22).

Regarding the promise of the wrongdoer to not misbehave again, Tavuchis (1991) suggests a helpful perspective on the nature of the wrongdoer's promise when he argues that such a promise inscribes the latter's future behavior in the realm of the accountable, while his past actions were out of this realm. Therefore, this promise is not essential for an apology to be well founded, because an apology is issued for what is inexcusable, that is, for what cannot be accounted for. Specifically, regarding political apologies – that is, apologies involving nation-states – Thompson (2010) argues that the intergenerational commitment that wrongdoings having taken place in the past of a society will not happen again, is empirically, conceptually, and morally impossible. This is true not only because

people have a limited sense of what the future will be like, but also because no one can take a commitment on behalf of her descendants knowing that they would fulfill it, and no one should decide what her descendants are to be committed to. Although these kinds of commitments may be necessary, it is not possible to guarantee that they will be fulfilled, and so they should not be considered as a requirement for an apology.

According to Tavuchis (1991), the elements of an apology must be contained in a speech. In fact, he defines apology as a speech act, which means that “it is simply not enough to feel sorry but to say so in order to convert a private condition into public communion” (64). Unlike Lazare, who conceives of nonverbal apologies as possible, provided that they contain acknowledgment of responsibility for an offense and an expression of remorse, Tavuchis claims that apology is essentially a discursive utterance. Therefore, the written word cannot replace the spoken word, because a written apologetic gesture does not fulfill the need of the victims to be recognized as such. In Tavuchis’ words (1991), “although an oral apology may be supplemented by the written word and symbolic tokens of conciliation, the latter, by themselves, are rarely considered to be sufficient or satisfactory” (23).

Although the approach to apology in terms of a speech act – or even as “an intricate set of speech acts” (Tavuchis 1991, 23) – is certainly interesting, it presents apology mostly as an act where the essential voice is that of the transgressor and speaker. In this regard, Yamazaki’s (2004) perspective on apology as a dynamic process of co-creation is appealing, since it gives a major role to the spoken word – which, as shown in the next chapter, it has indeed in apologetic gestures and political forgiveness more

broadly – but it does not restrict such role to the spoken word of the offender. According to Yamazaki, “the dialogue of these apologies is a dialogue not only between the immediate representatives of apologizer and victim/audience but also between past and present representations of history and regret” (156). By saying this, Yamazaki speaks about co-creation in two senses. Firstly, she examines and highlights the role of the recipient of the apology in the inter-subjective construction of meaning. His role is not just that of an external observer who accuses and judges, but also and essentially that of a “co-producer” (168) of those diverse representations of the past. This may suggest that, reciprocally, when the apologizer issues an apology, he is addressing the response that he imagines from the recipient of the gesture. Secondly, in Yamazaki’s approach an apology is co-creative in that it entails a dialogue between past and present.

B. On third parties and political apology

While Yamazaki’s (2004) model of apology as co-creation overcomes Tavuchis’ conceptualization of apology as a speech act, neither of these approaches fully accounts for political apologies, such as the one contained in Mujica’s speech (if it were to be examined as an apology). “Political apology is apology that directly involves nation-states or that in which states have taken interest to apologize on behalf of many or are on the receiving end on behalf of victims of grievous transgressions” (Negash 2006, 2). The reason why Tavuchis’ or Yamazaki’s approaches can only provide limited insights into political apologies is that these models assume that authentic apology happens

exclusively between two parties and political apologies necessarily have a public nature, which means that the “audience” or the “public” is not only a witness but a third active party and co-producer of the apology.

Even if Yamazaki (2004) affirms that “external or third-party constraints are important considerations in the apology” (169), and Tavuchis’ (1991) approach does not neglect “the potential moral and coercive influence of third parties” (50), the basic scheme of apology to which they subscribe remains binary, with an offender and an offended party. In this regard, Yamazaki conceptualizes the co-construction of apology as a dialogue, while Tavuchis speaks about a “dyadic pattern of sociation” (46). Moreover, the latter’s typology of apologies clearly reflects his two-party approach to the topic, since all the types are built around an offender and an offended party. According to Tavuchis’ typology, there are four types of apologies: the interpersonal apology (from One to One), the apology from an individual to a collective (from One to the Many), the apology from a collective to an individual (from the Many to One), and the apology from a collective to another (from the Many to the Many, or collective apology). Considering that political apologies commonly involve nation-states, all apologies, except those from the One to the One, could potentially be political apologies.

Although Tavuchis (1991) recognizes that the essential core of the apologies from the Many to the Many is that they are public – “that it [the speech] appears on public record *is* the apologetic fact,”³ he says (102) – he affirms through his book that the basic scheme of apology is in all cases similar to that of interpersonal apologies, that is, it is a two-party scheme. This is clearly shown in the citation below, where the author analyses

3. Italics are Tavuchis’.

the apology issued by the Japanese government to the people of Israel for the massacre at Israel's Lod Airport in 1972:⁴

The Japanese authorities, far from accepting the ontological status of third parties, defined themselves as symbolic co-offenders. As such, and as custodians of national honor, they were able to transform the individual responsibility of the terrorists into a collective one. Difficult as it may be for the Western mentality to comprehend, the whole culture (in a manner of speaking) accepted blame for what three of its members had done and thus nullified the concept of third parties.” (49)

In this regard, although the idea of collective responsibility mentioned by Tavuchis (1991) in these lines is a central one for this dissertation – I start to elaborate it in the next section of this chapter – Tavuchis' analysis of the Japanese public apology falls into reductionism when it presents it as only involving the offenders (and co-offenders) and the victims. This reductionism may be related to another one, consisting of examining the three types of apologies where one or both parties are collectivities, by comparing them to interpersonal apologies. This is what Tavuchis does, for instance, when he conceptualizes apology from the Many to the One through the example of the apology issued by the United Church of Canada to Rev. James Endicott in 1982⁵: “what it [the apology] required of him (and other recipients of collective regrets) was not only patience but a truly remarkable act of anthropomorphizing whereby, for all practical and moral purposes, the Many became a virtual natural person or One” (98). This analytical operation raises doubts about the utility of the typology: what is the point in designing a typology that distinguishes an apology from the Many to the One from an apology from

4. On May, 30 1972, three young Japanese nationals, members of the Red Army and recruited by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - External Operations (PFLP-EO) attacked Lod airport, the main airport of the country. The episode left twenty-six people dead and eighty people injured.

5. “The United Church of Canada finally apologized yesterday to Rev. James Endicott, a Chinese-born missionary who was forced to resign his ministry in 1946 after he was condemned by some church leaders for backing the Chinese Communist revolution” (Tavuchis 1991, 92, quoting the *Winnipeg Free Press* of 13 August 1982).

the One to the One, if at the end they become the same? Furthermore, Tavuchis' analysis overestimates the importance of the parties' numerical status, while it underestimates the relevance of the public or private character of an apology to understand it. Particularly, I am referring to Tavuchis' idea that only in the case of the apologies from the Many to the Many does the fact that there is a public audience significantly alter the nature and function of apology. In fact, for apologies from the One to the Many and from the Many to One, because they are essentially similar to interpersonal apologies, Tavuchis' assumption is that the function of apology is centered on expressing sorrow, which is the main function of interpersonal apologies. Only in the case of apologies from the Many to the Many, the function is to set a public record of the apologetic gesture – and yet he specifies that, with their particularities, collective apologies must be understood “still within the conceptual purview of what is recognized as interpersonal apology” (109). Why should we assume that the presence of an audience and the existence of a public record are relevant for apologies from the Many to the Many, and not for the other three types of apologies, which may be issued in public as well? It would be more reasonable to claim that the typical interpretative scheme of interpersonal apologies, where there are only two parties (offended and offender), exclusively applies to private apologetic gestures, but that, as soon as an apology is issued in front of an audience – regardless of the numerical status of the offended party and the party having committed the offense—there is a third party actively involved in the co-creation of the apology, and this needs to be considered in the interpretation. In other words, while the individual or collective nature of the actors involved in the apology matters, it does not suffice to effectively examine and grasp the phenomenon of apology. The private or public character of the

apology is at least as relevant as the numerical status of the participants and co-creators of the apology.

The claim I formulate as an alternative to Tavuchis' (1991) implies that political apologies, be they from the One to the Many, from the Many to One, or from the Many to the Many, should not be theorized as two-party events, but as (at least) three-party, because of their public nature.

C. Apologies by proxy, *apologos*, and collective responsibility

To this “three or more parties” scheme, we should add another element that makes the analysis of political apologies even more complex: the multiplicity of positions of the actors involved in the co-creation of the apology. As Thompson (2010) points out, political apologies are generally issued and received “by proxy,” that is, the direct perpetrators and survivors of atrocities rarely participate in the process, either because they have passed away or because they are not willing to offer or accept an apology. As a consequence, the apologetic acts often involve representatives of both those who were responsible for the deed and those who suffered it, which means that apologies are being issued by the former and received by the latter. Since “acting by proxy involves a dual orientation or perspective, one as an authoritative member of the collectivity, the other as an unencumbered individual, assuming, of course, that personal and institutional identities are not completely merged, to the detriment of the former” (Tavuchis 1991, 101), apologies by proxy bring into play the multiple statuses of the actors involved in the

process. In this regard, an actor may be the institutional representative of the perpetrator, but, as an individual, he may be a victim of this perpetrator. In this section, I propose to approach apology as a story (or a set of stories told in one same speech), as a way to grasp the complexity of political apologies, including the multiple statuses of its co-participants.

The literature on apology usually outlines the different etymologies of the word “apology” paying little attention to the Greek root, *apologos*, which refers to a story. Tavuchis (1991) claims that this connotation is contained in the different meanings that the word has adopted through time: “An apology is a special kind of enacted story whose remedial potential, unlike that of an account, stems from the acceptance by the aggrieved party of an admission of iniquity and defenselessness” (18). The author also points out that, as a story, an apology differs from a purely excusatory or explanatory statement in that, in the latter, the speaker seeks to minimize her responsibility, while in the former she does not.⁶

I propose to think about political apology as a story told within a political community. Specifically, by apologizing, the speaker steps in front of that community, acknowledges responsibility and expresses regret for his misdeeds or those of the entity on behalf of whom he speaks. The story told by the speaker is, thus, the story of his responsibility – or the responsibility of the entity he represents, which cannot speak. This approach to political apology, combined with the idea of apology as co-creation, provides

6. This questions Negash’s (2006) application of the notion of apology as a story to Clinton’s speech in Kigali (Rwanda) in 1998, where the former U.S. President referred to the inaction of the United States during the genocide in Somalia in 1994. According to Negash, Clinton’s apology was literally a story or an *apologos* because he did not fully acknowledge the U.S.’ responsibility in the slaughter, but rather provided a justification for the U.S.’ inaction and blurred his country’s responsibility behind the international community’s. However, considering Tavuchis’ (1991) conceptualization of *apologos* as a story that differs from an excuse, Clinton’s speech would fall outside of this category precisely because he minimizes his responsibility.

several insights on the topic, which are not offered by the approaches outlined in the literature on apology.

Firstly, by thinking about a political apology as story and co-creation, we assume that the story (or stories) contained in an apologetic speech will trigger other stories among the audience. The public is not a homogeneous group nor a simple third party witnessing a dialogue between offenders and victims; rather, it unites the voices of citizens who, like the apologizer, are not necessarily defined as either offended or offender, nor do they have a unique role in the story that is being told. They have stories to tell too. Therefore, it stems from the idea of apology as story and collective construction of meaning, that each story is one among others. No single story is *the history* of a society's past grievances. From this perspective, the public space is constituted by and through these intertwined stories. Analyzing the story that the Uruguayan President tells in his speech means to examine it as part of this weave of stories.

Moreover, approaching apology as a co-created set of stories not only helps us step out from a binary scheme where there is an active speaker/transgressor and a passive listener/victim, but also from the idea that an actor has one role and one version of the past to share. Indeed, by shedding light on the multiplicity of statuses that actors involved in a political apology by proxy may have, the approach I propose is sensitive to the possibility that an actor who apologizes speaks at different moments of the speech from different roles – for instance, an institutional and an individual one, from which the versions of the past differ – or tells more than one story in the same apologetic speech –

for example, the story of his responsibility as a bystander and as an offender, or as a victim of certain crimes and the perpetrator of others.

This brings us to the second aspect in which this approach contributes to enriching the analysis of political apologies provided by the conventional literature on the issue: the grasp of the collective dimension of responsibility in past wrongdoings. Hannah Arendt (2003) claims that “two conditions have to be present for collective responsibility: I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve” (149). In this regard, a possible interpretation of the notion of collective responsibility is that, beyond the role we played in the past – which establishes different types and degrees of legal responsibility according to the statuses we hold in the past and the ones we held in the present – inasmuch as we belong to a political community, we all bear political responsibility for how the past events and their consequences are dealt with in that community. Therefore, the acknowledgment of collective responsibility requires that we add to every other role that we play in our story or stories of the past, the role of a citizen who is politically responsible for wrongdoings for which he may not be held legally responsible, because he did not participate in them. By subscribing to this concept, I am arguing that, as long as we belong to a political community, we bear political responsibility not only for its present and future, but also for its past – even if we were born in the aftermath of the conflict during which atrocities were materially carried out.

Thirdly, thinking about an apology as a story connects it with the collective work of remembering, since the exercise of telling stories as a political community is an

exercise of collective memory. As a story or a set of stories, an apology can certainly contribute to counteract forgetfulness. In this regard, Tavuchis (1991) claims that, “if there is no call, no urgency to remember, no struggle against the natural tendency to forget, then there is no occasion for apology . . .” (21-22). By supporting this idea, I take distance from Tavuchis’ claim, mentioned above, that an apology cannot undo what was done, but that it has the potential to erase the offense, when forgiveness follows apology:

We cannot undo what we have done and admitted doing, on the one hand, or forgive what is explainable, on the other hand. Instead, I argue that the singular achievement of apologetic discourse paradoxically resides in its capacity to effectively eradicate the consequences of the offense by evoking the unpredictable faculty of forgiveness.” (viii)

In other words, apology cannot alter the fact that the wrongdoing existed, but has the ability to efface its effects through forgiveness (which is an idea that will be further discussed in the next pages). If apology cannot undo the harm but can erase it, apology and remembrance would exist in tension. I argue instead that apology neither undoes *nor* erases an injustice, and that apology contributes to remembering the past by putting stories in the public space. Moreover, inasmuch as apology and forgiveness are positively connected, apology requires remembrance. Indeed, one cannot issue an apology or request or grant forgiveness without remembering that fault. In Lazare’s (2004) words, “forgiveness is not the same as forgetting, because one must remember the offense in order to forgive” (231). The next section deals precisely with the relationship between apology and forgiveness.

D. Apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation

What is the role of forgiveness in an apology?

According to the literature on apology, this question has two answers. Firstly, forgiveness is the result of apology. Tavuchis (1991) argues that “a proper and successful apology is the middle term in a moral syllogism that commences with a call and ends with forgiveness” (20). From this perspective, then, apology and forgiveness belong to a time *continuum* of cause and effect. Tavuchis’ approach, whose main focus is apology and not forgiveness, presents forgiveness as a function of a proper apology. Apology can be considered as a requirement for forgiveness to be possible, and forgiveness appears as apology’s necessary corollary. In other words, apology is approached as the act of requesting forgiveness, and forgiveness, as the act of granting the apology. In fact, according to Tavuchis, if there is an authentic apology today, there will be forgiveness tomorrow: “the commonplace phrase, ‘I am sorry’, conveys a simple description of one’s own condition – a condition that, if accepted as *authentic*, would warrant forgiveness by the other” (19). Reciprocally, those who apologize do it with the intention of being granted forgiveness, specifically for that which cannot be accounted for in any way. Moreover, because forgiveness is presented as the consequence of an accepted apology, for this thinker the apologizable and the forgivable are equivalent.

Tavuchis’ (1991) formulation of apology also includes reconciliation. Like forgiveness, reconciliation comes after the apology, as its consequence: “apology is a decisive moment in a complex restorative project arising from an unaccountable infraction and culminating in remorse and reconciliation” (45). In sum, from his

perspective, apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation are all conceptually aligned. Negash (2006), for his part, argues that a successful apology leads to reconciliation, yet apology may not suffice for forgiveness to be granted by the victims.⁷ By contrast with Tavuchis' (1991) and Negash's (2006) views on reconciliation, in her book on official apologies, Nobles (2008) highlights the complexity of the concept of reconciliation, thereby questioning an easy positive connection with that of apology. Starting from the idea that reconciliation means "not only more harmonious societal relations, but also alterations in political, economic, and, possibly, legal arrangements" (33), Nobles argues that apologies may undermine reconciliation by triggering resistance among some individual or collective members of the community.

The second answer to the question about the role of forgiveness in an apology is the restoration of political membership for the wrongdoers, that is, forgiveness is the means by which apology rehabilitates the offenders into the political community. In fact, according to Tavuchis (1991), to be forgiven means for the offender to regain his status as a member of a political community. If forgiveness amounts to political reinstatement, denial of a request of forgiveness amounts to exclusion from the political community: "this work (and the genre) recognizes that an apology [...] seeks forgiveness, that is, recertification of bona fide membership and unquestioned inclusion within a moral order"⁸ (27). The relation between apologies and membership is the focus of Nobles' (2008) work. This thinker identifies three dimensions in membership, which are bound

7. "I thus suggest four criteria for a successful public apology that are necessary to bring about healing and reconciliation: acknowledgment, truth-telling, accountability, and public remorse. These are the minimal requirements for a successful apology by perpetrators of mass crimes and wrongdoings whether or not victims demand them and forgiveness is given" (Negash 2006, 9).

8. This does not mean that apologies are necessarily conservative, since they may constitute, for instance, an act of recognition of new social norms (Tavuchis, 1991).

together: a legal one, a political one, and an affective one. “The legal status of one’s membership as a citizen (whether one is or is not a citizen) profoundly affects one’s feelings of belonging, the political rights one may exercise, and one’s perception and treatment by others” (36). Nobles claims, precisely, that, unlike reparations, which close social debate, apologies open it, by addressing claims on political membership. In other words, while reparations aim at compensating harm, apologies favor the opening of discussions on rights.

The treatment of the link between apology and forgiveness is one of the biggest gaps in the conventional literature on apology. Although this literature, for the most part, mentions the topic of forgiveness as underlying that of apology, the fact that forgiveness is plainly associated with apology – even treated as its equivalent – or approached as a stage of a sequential process with a beginning and an end, and that it is conceptualized as its end or as the means for the end of reinstating political membership, deserves to be at least problematized, since these appear *a priori* as simplistic and/or inaccurate views on the topic. Notwithstanding Nobles’ view on apologies as opening public discussion, there is an idea stemming from the approach to forgiveness as the end of apology and the final stage of a process of reconciliation – which pervades the standard literature on the issue – that both apology and forgiveness are processes that can be successfully completed. This ultimately leads to closure, which is regarded as undesirable in much of the literature on apology and forgiveness. In Thompson’s (2010) words, “there is a sense in which by apologizing agents are making an effort to fulfill a responsibility that cannot be discharged in a way that truly answers to the occasion or the wrong” (263). This means

that the apologizable is not only unjustifiable, as said above – otherwise that responsibility could probably be discharged – it also cannot be measured as “successful” or “unsuccessful” because it aims at accomplishing a task that cannot be fully accomplished.

Apology – and forgiveness, as I will argue in the next chapter – is an exercise of responsibility as an endless struggle. Particularly, a political apology is a gesture through which political actors contribute to a collective, co-created weave of stories of responsibility and to the co-creation of a story of collective responsibility. This story informs political forgiveness as it is conceptualized in this work. This conceptualization is the object of the next chapter.

Interlude 1

On imagination, the Word, and my abuela Maruja

“My real territory was imagination, fantasy, regulated madness to the extent of the possible. So – you understand, right? – these events, if they were such, these facts or mostly these anecdotes were at the frontier between what was real and what was not.

Until the Word arrived.”¹

Mauricio Rosencof 2010, 138

The Letters that Never Came [Las cartas que no llegaron]

“When we speak, we undo the world and we leave it the way it is” – these are probably the words that most strikingly remind me of my grandmother. I carry these words wherever I go. She is not in the past but I am here and she is there, so we can only meet where time and space converge, where time and space do not actually exist, because when they meet they magically cancel each other. My grandmother and I meet in a strange territory of random temporality. In the Word, we meet. Through the Word we undo the world and leave it the way it is.

When she was young, and then when she was not so young anymore, my abuela Maruja would have dreamt of becoming a writer, if there had been room for regulated madness in her life. She smelt like soup and books, my grandmother. (Now I am here and she is there, so I am not sure how she smells anymore.) She can lose everything, but not

1. “Mi territorio real era la imaginación, la fantasía, la locura reglamentada en la medida de lo posible, Entonces – entendés? – esos acontecimientos, si lo eran, esos hechos o más bien esas anécdotas estaban en la frontera entre lo real y lo que no. Hasta que llegó La Palabra”.

her books. And she has lost a lot of things in her life. Even her sight, almost completely. She still reads, though. She uses some very thick lenses, called magnifying glasses in English. When I was a kid we used to play with magnifying lenses to make fire. Rosencof says fire was a way for people through history to keep memory alive, because around the fire they meet to tell their stories, the ones that they do not want time to burn, but that definitely need to be transformed collectively. I imagine that my grandmother remembers and burns what she remembers, at the same time, with her thick lenses. Maybe memory is that which we save from the flames of time, but also what is left after the fire. Maybe this fire also founds memory, in the end.

I wonder if in her memory my grandmother listens to what she once read. I wonder if the written word became spoken word, in the depth of her soul. Maybe the written word has been her map to navigate the territory of imagination. There is no way to get lost in the territory of imagination. The territory becomes the map, the lenses become the word, the written word becomes the spoken word, there is no more here and there. There only is the Word.

My abuela Maruja said that Rosencof's was one of her favorite books. Like President Mujica, Rosencof is a former Uruguayan *guerrillero*. But la abuela Maruja said they are different, she said that Rosencof is different from many former *guerrilleros*, because he found the way out from the personal and political tragedy he underwent when he was young – the tragedy of wanting to undo the world to make it anew and finally leaving it... just the way it is. She said that his way out was the way through his imagination, nourished by his memory. Imagination and memory saved him from silence, when they enabled him and the soul living in the next jail cell to communicate through

soft knocks on the wall. Each letter amounted to as many soft knocks as the number corresponding to its position in the alphabet. I imagine that Rosencof survived the silence by telling himself and his cellmate the stories that he tells in *The Letters that Never Came*, softly knocking the wall of his cell. Perhaps the first pages of this novel were written on the paper that he had to make cigarettes, the same paper that he occasionally got in exchange of love letters for the girlfriends of his jailers.

The Letters that Never Came are the letters that he wrote in his imagination to his father. I wonder if they are still imagination, since they were published. Are they still part of imagination, now that they are ours too, these letters, now that they belong to all who read them – now that they remind us that we are all sitting around the same fire? I am reading Rosencof’s book here, not there, but I suddenly find myself there. We are all reunited, Rosencof-father, Rosencof-son, my grandmother, and I, around a fire, having soup. And, inevitably, I am reading these letters that fortunately came to me, through the lenses of my grandmother. The lenses that burn and create memory at the same time, the lenses that save memory and that save her from losing one more thing in her life.

In Rosencof’s dedication to my grandmother, he wrote: “to the unpublished grandmother”. I am wondering what letters she would have written, if madness had been a possibility for her. I am thinking of what letter I could write to her. (My abuela Maruja would indeed need a lot of imagination to understand this letter, because she actually does not speak English.)

With love,

Tu nieta

Chapter 2

Conceptualizing political forgiveness

Forgiveness makes its appearance precisely in order to make the experience of the absence of any definitive resolution and, nonetheless, to take it to the point where the possibility of togetherness has to somehow be re-established.

Acosta López 2012, 57

“Hegel and Derrida on Forgiveness: the Impossible at the Core of the Political”

As suggested in the previous chapter, the notion of political forgiveness has been under-theorized both in the field of political sociology, in its connection with the concept of apology, and in the field of political philosophy. This chapter intends firstly to go through three of the most significant approaches to the topic of forgiveness in the field of political philosophy – Arendt’s, Jankélévitch’s, and Derrida’s – to then build upon these contributions as well as upon some insights from Hegel and propose a conceptualization of political forgiveness that supports political action in the aftermath of major wrongdoings, without aiming at closure.

Unlike other works, which define political forgiveness, this dissertation elaborates on the notion of political forgiveness as an elusive one, existing tragically, at the limit between conceptual impossibility and practical possibility, and thus as a notion to be grasped, rather than defined by enumerating its components or its facilitating conditions.¹

1. This is the case in Digeser’s (2001) work *Political Forgiveness*, as well as in Daye’s (2004) book *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa*. Digeser (2001) asserts that there are seven “conditions” for the “success” of political forgiveness: “(1) the existence of a relationship between at least two parties in which (2) there is a debt owed to one party by the other (3) that is relieved by a party with appropriate standing, (4) conveying the appropriate signs or utterances, (5) whose success does not depend

In this regard, the methodological approach chosen in this work reveals the epistemological and theoretical approaches on which it relies, and their mutually constitutive nature. Another difference between this work and the previous ones on the topic is the connection between political forgiveness and the Arendtian concept of collective responsibility. The latter is at the very core of the conceptualization of political forgiveness furthered here.

A. Forgiveness at the intersection of contingency and unconditionality

“A commission or a government cannot forgive. Only I, eventually, could do it. (And I am not ready to forgive)” (Derrida 2001, 43). “The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even more angry, is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness” (Verwoed 2003, 264). These were the words of two Apartheid victims during the hearings of the South-African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.² These statements point to three features of forgiveness. It is contingent: it may or may not occur, and even its existence is uncertain. It is an event: it may follow a process or not – this is why some people can be “ready” to forgive and others not – but if it occurs, it ends at a

on the emotional or internal states of the forgivers, (6) even though it is generally thought good to receive what is due because (7) the effect of inviting the restoration of the offender or the debtor is somehow also thought to be good” (35). Daye (2004), for its part, brings up Donald Shriver’s definition of political forgiveness in a book entitled *An Ethic for Enemies*. According to Daye (2004), there are four components to that definition: “memory, in particular memory that contains a moral judgment of wrong, injustice, and injury”, “the abandonment of vengeance”, “empathy for the humanity of the enemy”, and “the renewal of human relationship” (21).

2. In fact, the very last sentence of the speech that the Chairman of the TRC, the Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999), gave at the end of the first day of hearings, says as follows: “Forgiveness will follow confession and healing will happen, and so contribute to national unity and reconciliation” (120).

specific moment in time. And it is the survivors' exclusive prerogative as individuals to grant it or not.

The aspects of forgiveness pointed out by these survivors can be traced to different extents in Arendt's, Jankélévitch's, and Derrida's³ conceptualizations of forgiveness in the public sphere.

1. Forgiveness as contingency

The notion of forgiveness arises in Arendt's philosophical project as part of her theory of labor, work, and action. For her, as the capacity of fabrication redeems the *animal laborans* from the endlessly repetitive process of producing and consuming, and the faculty of action redeems the *homo faber* from the meaningless transformation of means into ends, so too the power to make and keep promises and the power to forgive redeems the political agent from what one could see as the tragedy of action. The tragedy of action lies in that, good as our intentions may be, the consequences of our actions are both unpredictable and irreversible (Klusmeyer 2009). The power to make and keep promises and the faculty to forgive appear in Arendt's work as the possible *ex ante* and *ex post* remedies to the unpredictable and irreversible character of action, respectively. In this regard, Arendt counters action with more action, power with more power.

3. In his essay "On Forgiveness" (in French: "Le Siècle et le Pardon"), originally published in 1999 as a response to the French journal *Le Monde des Débats*, Derrida addresses some of the questions raised and treated by Jankélévitch in his book *Forgiveness (Le Pardon)*, first published in 1967, and in his essay to the French journal *Le Monde des Débats*, "Should We Pardon Them?" ("Pardonner?"). The latter was based on a letter that Jankélévitch wrote to *Le Monde* on January 1965, followed by an article published in February 1965 in *Révue Administrative*. He wrote both pieces in the midst of public discussion around the imprescriptibility of Nazi crimes, on which the French Parliament was about to vote. "Should We Pardon Them?" was firstly published in 1971 and then again in 1986, posthumously, in a book entitled *L'imprescriptible*, along with another essay from 1948, "Dans l'honneur et la dignité".

While the agent cannot possibly know the consequences of his action and cannot undo what he has done, by having his deed forgiven he can be released of those consequences, as are those who have forgiven. Forgiveness enables human beings to stop the chain of mere re-actions following an initial act of wrongdoing. While forgiving is a reaction in itself, Arendt (1998) asserts that “it is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it” (241). From Arendt’s (2006) perspective, then, forgiveness comes to put an end to the otherwise endless domino-chain of vengeance, allowing freedom by enabling the beginning of something new, unpredictable, and ultimately miraculous, in the public sphere. “It is in the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an ‘infinite improbability’, and yet it is precisely this infinite improbability which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. Our whole existence rests, after all, on a chain of miracles” (168). From the moment she conceptualizes the act of forgiving as an action and thus, as a miracle, Arendt points to the contingent nature of forgiveness.

However, even if Arendt (2006) seems to exalt contingency in political life, her view on contingency is not exempt from paradoxes. On the one hand, miracles are unpredictable; on the other hand, the occurrence of miraculous events in history – unlikely in nature – is in itself expectable. She argues that the actions she refers to as “miracles” are not in fact unusual or rare. As she puts it, “here [in history] the miracle of accident occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all” (169). What makes historical events miraculous and gives them worldly reality at the same time, is that they are performed by the *initium* man, whose capacity to act or to start something new, resists the automatism of meaningless repetition and disaster.

Another paradox of Arendt's approach to the contingency of action is that, although she ties the power of forgiveness to its unforeseeable nature, the faculty of making promises is meant to mitigate the unpredictable consequences of actions like forgiveness (Hirsch 2012), by setting up "islands of security" in the "ocean of uncertainty" (Arendt 1998, 237). Therefore, the faculty of making promises counters the power of forgiveness in such a way that tragedy ends up unfolding from the same devices that are meant to remedy the tragic nature of action.

Both Derrida in his essay *On Forgiveness* (2001) and Jankélévitch (2005) in his book *Forgiveness* agree with Arendt's view of forgiveness as contingent. The contingent character of forgiveness comes about by virtue of the fact that, in its pure form, it is an unconditional act, that is, unmotivated: "forgiveness does not forgive *because of*; forgiveness pays no attention to justifying itself and giving reasons, for as concerns reasons, it has none" (Jankélévitch 2005, 94).⁴

In this regard, Jankélévitch distinguishes between "pure" (unmotivated) forgiveness and two types of what he calls "pseudo-forgiveness." The first type is granted based on the argument that time erodes the unforgivability of the fault, either because historical progress requires us to leave the past behind and move on, or because time attenuates the severity of the misdeed by partially erasing or blurring the memory of it (Hollander 2013) – what Jankélévitch (2005) refers to as "temporal decay" (13). Jankélévitch rules out this argument by stating that "[time] neutralizes the *effects* of the misdeed, but it cannot destroy the *fact* of the misdeed" (48). This goes along the same line as Tavuchis' (2001) affirmation discussed in the previous chapter, that apology can

4. Italics are Jankélévitch's. For the rest of the dissertation italics in citations are the thinkers', except as otherwise specified.

erase the misdeed but not undo it. Moreover, time does not have the ability to affect the “normative order of value; and value, for its part, is of a *wholly other order* than time” (47). In other words, for Jankélévitch (2005) time belongs to the order of facts, that is, it has a pragmatic foundation, while normative issues, such as pure forgiveness, remain extra-temporal. Jankélévitch furthers this idea when he claims that “in order to forgive, it is necessary to remember” (56). From this perspective, forgiving based on partially forgetting the fault amounts to false forgiveness.

The second type of “pseudo-forgiveness” is granted based on what Jankélévitch (2005) calls “the intellectual excuse,” that is, “the taking of a position on the wrongs of the culprit of whom a fault is reproached” which “implies the moral appreciation of the act that it excuses” (58) by examining the intentions involved in it and by acknowledging their complexity. Specifically, the intellectual excuse amounts to the denial of the wrongdoer’s evil intentions or the affirmation of the insignificance of the misdeed. In this case, according to Jankélévitch, forgiveness itself lacks foundation, because there is simply nothing to be forgiven: what can be excused on the basis of the absence of ill will does not need to be forgiven. Since there is no wickedness on the part of the trespasser, there is no reason for rancor, which is, in Jankélévitch’s view, what forgiveness is supposed to overcome. Furthermore, the responsibility of the wrongdoer is lessened by the lack of an ill intention on his part.

By contrast, pure forgiveness is, in Jankélévitch’s (2005) words, a “gratuitous gift” (37), since the forgiving attitude of the offended party does not depend on the offender’s – for instance, on his repentance or on his request for forgiveness. The unconditionality of pure forgiveness, which Jankélévitch captures in the expression

“gratuitous gift,” is in turn captured by Derrida’s conceptualization of forgiveness as an “aneconomic” (50) act of morality. According to him, in its pure form forgiveness is not an exchange, that is, it is not inscribed in an economic scheme where an agent gives something to another agent and the latter receives it and gives something in return (Lotz 2006).

The idea that pure forgiveness is unconditional disentangles forgiveness from repentance, but also, from any other reason – for instance, from legal punishment. In fact, in a Hegel-inspired argument, Derrida (2001) claims that forgiveness “must remain intact, inaccessible to law, to politics, even to morals: absolute” (55).⁵

The approach of pure forgiveness as a “gratuitous” and “aneconomic” act challenges the idea, examined by Minow (1998) that, when it occurs, forgiveness is to be based on good reasons – repentance on the part of the trespasser potentially being one of them. Specifically, Minow analyzes the idea that “a reason to forgive arises, for some, when a wrongdoer changes, becomes ‘a new person’ who repents his or her wrongs” (18). The limit she sees in this argument is that, in the case of major wrongdoings, however deep repentance is, it could not possibly reach the depth of the suffering caused by the misdeed. Derrida (2001), for his part, suggests that forgiveness is to be granted to the guilty as guilty: “If I say, ‘I forgive you on the condition that, asking forgiveness, you would thus have changed and would no longer be the same’, do I forgive?” (38). Jankélévitch (2005) too argues that the person who genuinely forgives does not expect the forgiven other to become someone who deserves the grace of forgiveness. This does not mean that forgiveness cannot actually trigger a positive change in the wrongdoer’s

5. In *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Hegel (1971) argues that something is absolute “so long as it is unconditional, or so long as it has no aspect from which both it and what conditions it can be seen to be subordinate to a higher sphere” (228).

identity, but that it did not aim at redeeming her soul. Jankélévitch goes further and states that neither the offender nor the offended should expect remorse or forgiveness, respectively, to be their salvation. “The condition of the efficaciousness of despair, whether it is called *remorse* or *forgiveness*, is the perfect innocence of the hopeless person.” And he prophesies: “for whoever wants to find salvation will miss it” (121).

Not only does forgiveness not have reasons, but – as Jankélévitch (2005) puts it – the essence of forgiveness is precisely the absence of conditions: “if we forgive it is because we do not have reasons; and if we had reasons, then it is the excuse, and not forgiveness, that is competent. Reasons for forgiveness abolish the *raison d’être* of forgiveness” (107). From his perspective, genuine forgiveness only forgives the inexcusable, which is what cannot be justified, explained, or understood: forgiveness is therefore “the supreme recourse and the ultimate grace” (106). Reciprocally, the inexcusable can only be forgiven.

Moreover, in both Derrida’s piece and Jankélévitch’s (2005) book *Forgiveness*, genuine forgiveness is contingent and unconditional because it comes into play when there is nothing else left to do in the aftermath of a wrongdoing. Each thinker expresses this same idea in different terms: for Jankélévitch, ultimately, nothing is unforgivable while for Derrida (2001) it is only the unforgivable that calls for forgiveness. While for Jankélévitch forgiveness forgives what is not unforgivable – “the inexcusable is in fact not unforgivable; and the incomprehensible is not unforgivable, either!” (106) – for Derrida (2001) “forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable” (32). Moreover, Derrida explicitly states that what calls for forgiveness are precisely the radical injustices

(Thompson, 2010). “If there is something to forgive, it would be what in religious language is called mortal sin, the worst, the unforgivable crime or harm” (Derrida 2001, 32). This is what Derrida refers to as the *aporia* of forgiveness, by which forgiveness is contingent at once *because of* and *in spite of* its unconditionality.

Furthermore, the apparent impossibility of forgiveness becomes its actual condition of possibility. In both Jankélévitch’s (2005) and Derrida’s (2001) approaches, forgiveness, because it lacks reasons and thus challenges the limits of the possible, is an act of madness. Derrida refers to forgiveness as a “madness of the impossible” (45). Jankélévitch, for his part, traces a parallelism between his approach to forgiveness as madness and Pascal’s conceptualization of faith. The latter is based on the idea that we should believe in the existence of God precisely because it is not demonstrable, and so believing is the only thing left to do. Similarly, according to Jankélévitch’s approach to forgiveness, what makes the inexcusable forgivable is precisely that it cannot be excused, and there is nothing left to do but to forgive it. Moreover, like faith in Pascal’s approach, from the perspective of causality forgiveness is a self-generated phenomenon: it is by believing that faith occurs, it is by forgiving that forgiveness is actually made possible. According to Jankélévitch (2005), for Pascal “First and Then are reversed” (147). Although she does not speak specifically about forgiveness as an act of madness, Arendt’s approach to human existence as a sequence of miracles that challenge probability and predictability can certainly be related with Derrida’s and Jankélévitch’s conceptualization of forgiveness as an act of madness that defies the limits of the possible.

Although in *Le Pardon*, Jankélévitch (2005) accounts for forgiveness as being both contingent and unconditional, and denies the existence of the unforgivable, in the essay “Should We Pardon Them?” (1996) when expressing his perspective regarding the forgivability and prescriptibility of Nazi crimes, he held a negative view: “Pardoning died in the death camps” (567). There are two closely related reasons for this affirmation, which is in turn a contradiction with what he affirmed in *Forgiveness*. Firstly, according to Jankélévitch, the incommensurability of Nazi crimes with any other atrocity ever committed makes them inexpiable – that is, unpunishable – and thus they are and should remain in the realm of the unforgivable. In this regard, it could then be said that in “Should We Pardon Them?” Jankélévitch is closer to Arendt than to Derrida, in that, while for the latter forgiveness does not rest upon punishment of the guilty, for the former two, what cannot be punished cannot be forgiven, and *vice versa*.

Secondly, perpetrators of these atrocities never asked forgiveness: “To pardon! But who ever asked us for a pardon? [...] To presume to be pardoned one must admit to being guilty, without conditions or alleging extenuating circumstances” (Jankélévitch 1996, 567). For the Jankélévitch (1996) speaking in “Should We Pardon Them?” then, forgiveness is contingent, but not necessarily unconditional. While in *Forgiveness* (Jankélévitch (2005) conceives of forgiveness as contingent *because of* but also *in spite of* being unconditional, in “Should We Pardon Them?” (1996) forgiveness is contingent upon two conditions: the expiable nature of the wrongdoing and the trespasser’s repentance. Because no details are given on which condition takes precedence over the other (expiability of the fault or repentance of the offender), it is not clear if for

Jankélévitch absolute repentance can be sufficient for forgiveness to be taken into consideration by the offender, even if the crime is inexpiable.

Arendt (1998), for her part, argues that forgiveness is essentially conditional: there is a reason to forgive – that the agent did not know and could not possibly know what he was doing – and there is a motivation to forgive – the respect of the other, which implies that “*what* was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it” (241). As unfolds from this statement, for Arendt we forgive something, not someone. This does not preclude the fact that forgiveness is a relationship between persons. At the same time, Arendt argues that when a wrongdoer refuses to repent for what he did, he renounces his being a person. Therefore, one could infer from these statements that, for Arendt, unlike for Jankélévitch and Derrida, in the absence of repentance of the trespasser forgiveness of his misdeed is not possible – no personal relationship between offender and offended can be established.

Arendt’s conditional approach to forgiveness is also visible in that not everything is forgivable. In her conceptualization of forgiveness, she emphasizes that, although men have the power to forgive, there are some humanly unforgivable offenses⁶ – possibly those which men cannot punish, because in her view men cannot forgive what they cannot punish, and *vice versa*. These major wrongdoings, to which in *The Human Condition* Arendt (1998) refers with the Kantian category of “radical evil,”⁷ render people powerless. Furthermore, according to Arendt (2003) in *Responsibility and*

6. Throughout Arendt’s project it seems that those offenses that cannot be humanly forgiven could not be forgiven by God either. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) states that “crime and willed evil are rare [...]; according to Jesus, they will be taken care of by God in the Last Judgment, which plays no role whatsoever in life on earth, and the Last Judgment is not characterized by forgiveness but by just retribution . . .” (240). In the same vein, in *Responsibility and Judgment*, evoking Jesus’ teachings, Arendt (2003) says: “Jesus never said what this evil is that can’t be forgiven by men or God . . .” (125).

7. She would nonetheless take distance from this concept in her subsequent work. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1994), she proposes the concept of the “banality of evil”, and in *Responsibility and Judgment* (2003), she argues that major evil is not radical.

Judgment, evil is, in Jesus' view, a "stumbling stone" or *skandalon*, which means that such evil not only renders people powerless in the present, it also appears to hinder future actions. "The *skandalon* is what is not in our power to repair – by forgiving or by punishment – and what therefore remains an obstacle for all future performances and doings" (125).

Why would Arendt put a limit to the human ability to forgive, when she points to Jesus' teachings on the capacity of people – and not only God – to forgive? One could interpret that the exclusion of major wrongdoings from the realm of human forgiveness is consistent with Arendt's conceptualization of action and power as being at odds with violence. While undoing the process of making durable use objects implies their destruction and thus, violence (the same violence that was required to produce those objects), in the realm of action, by contrast, destruction is not a possibility and violence is excluded.

However, here is where another tragic paradox arises in Arendt's (1994) project. On the one hand, violence and power are at odds; in her words, "violence, as distinguished from power, is mute" (308). On the other hand, Arendt also states that all beginnings are violent, and thus there is necessarily an ingredient of violence in action and power (Hirsch 2012; Klusmeyer 2009) because power is created by acting together and to act is precisely to begin something new in the public space. Moreover, since it is an action in itself, and thus a beginning, forgiveness is violent. Nonetheless, forgiveness is – by the same token – that which avoids the violence of retribution, which is precisely what renders it unpredictable. As Hirsch (2012) sums up, "like beginnings that, violent

though they are, also supply the source for all non-violent political power, forgiveness ends up circumventing violence only by being itself violent” (51).

2. The event of forgiveness

According to Lotz’s (2006) interpretation of Derrida’s work, the conceptualization of forgiveness as an event is closely interrelated with its unpredictable character – and thus with its unconditionality. Lotz argues that, from Derrida’s perspective, forgiveness as an act of morality cannot be predicted and it is thus an event, which means that it is unconditional – alien to any sort of instrumental or rational logic and specifically, to the economic structure of giving and receiving. It becomes therefore a rationally “*unconceivable* event” (Lotz 2006, 262).

Derrida’s conceptualization of forgiveness as an unconditional event and an “*aneconomic*” act of morality engenders an interesting paradox. If forgiveness is an event, and is thus unconditional, it can happen at any moment. It is not only possible, but always possible: “if forgiving does not, as Derrida claims, belong to the order of the *exchange*, then we cannot a priori exclude the possibility that it *can* happen; for it *could* happen, but no one may ever know when and where” (Lotz 2006, 269). However, if forgiveness is always an empirical possibility, then it cannot be an “*aneconomic*” act of morality, but, on the contrary, it necessarily belongs to the world of exchange. If that is the case, it is impossible to conceive of forgiveness as unconditional because in the world of economic exchange it is impossible to annul intentions, expectations, and predictions.

Therefore, if forgiveness is an unconditioned event it is always possible, but if it is always possible it cannot be unconditioned.

Apart from being unconditional, the event of forgiveness as Derrida conceptualizes it is a performative act, since “it is based on a moment of decision that cannot be rationalized” (Lotz 2006, 262). It is a singular decision, taken in a single instant, without intentions, calculations, or expectations involved in it. The decision of forgiveness as an act of morality does not follow any pre-existent, universal rule, because “a law can *never* be fully appropriate to a single case and a single instant” (266). If that were the case, the difference between present and future would be annulled and there would be no real decision, just calculations of consequences and calculated consequences. Therefore, the decision of forgiveness always appears as an exception, after which the rule may or may not be affirmed but during which it is suspended. This single moment where the decision is performed is a moment of “undecidability” (266), in which what makes a decision possible is precisely the suspension of the possibility to decide. This suspension stems, in turn, from the impossibility of applying the rule in order to take a decision, since, as pointed out above, the rule cannot strictly be applied because it cannot possibly be appropriate for the single case. The instant of forgiveness is thus an interruption in the *continuum* between the unconditional rule and its contingent application. In Derrida’s (2001) words, forgiveness may be precisely “the only thing that arrives, that surprises, like a revolution, the ordinary course of history, politics, and law” (39). Moreover, because it does not follow any universal rule or derive from any form of knowledge, the decision performed in the instant of undecidability is a “blind” (Lotz 2006, 257) decision, beyond any rationality. In an approach that certainly recalls Arendt’s

idea that when men act they do not actually know what they are doing, Derrida argues that the instant of decision itself remains a secret even for the agent performing the decision.

Jankélévitch's (2005) conceptualization of forgiveness as an event overlaps with Derrida's in major ways. In fact, in the introduction to *Forgiveness*, Jankélévitch too points to the unconceivability of the event of forgiveness: "It is not difficult to understand why the duty to forgive has today become our problem. Forgiveness is... an event that has never occurred in history." According to Hollander (2013), with this opening, Jankélévitch points to the historical nature of forgiveness both as a problem and a possible response to major wrongdoings, while stressing its extra-empirical nature – there is something to it that escapes the realm of the worldly conceivable.

Also, like Derrida, Jankélévitch (2005) approaches forgiveness as an instant of blind, extra-rational decision. His approach to genuine forgiveness as an event, and thus, as an instantaneous occurrence, which starts and ends in an instant and happens once and for all, is to be understood as part of his view of an instant as that which "designates the ungraspable threshold where being ceases to be something and where nothing ceases to be nothing, where each contradictory is at the point of and even in the middle of becoming its contradictory" (xvi).⁸ This "ungraspable threshold" where contradictories simultaneously affirm and deny each other – meaning that there is a radical inversion of contradictories, "a change *of all into all*" (Jankélévitch 2005, 153) – seems to be quite close to Derrida's notion of undecidability. In this regard, it is interesting how the conceptualization of forgiveness as an event acts as the pivot point of its paradoxes.

8. These are Jankélévitch's words quoted by the translator of the book *Forgiveness*, Andrew Kelley, in the Translator's Introduction.

Indeed, in light of Jankélévitch's theorization of the instant, the tension between his views in *Forgiveness* and in "Should We Pardon Them?" becomes less an unintended inconsistency and more an expression of his theoretical approach to forgiveness as an event, and thus necessarily as a point of convergence between contradictories. In fact, Jankélévitch (1996) refers to the apparent contradiction between his views in *Forgiveness* – which he describes as a "purely philosophical study" – and in "Should We Pardon Them?" in the following terms:

Between the absolute of the law of love and the absolute of vicious liberty there is a tear that cannot be entirely sundered. I have not attempted to reconcile the irrationality of evil with the omnipotence of love. Forgiveness is as strong as evil, but evil is as strong as forgiveness. (553)

In this statement Jankélévitch makes visible the "ungraspable threshold" between contradictories by capturing the instant of the tear, where forgiveness/love and evil exist as simultaneously irreconcilable and indissociable.

Despite the major overlaps between Derrida and Jankélévitch, the conceptualization of forgiveness as an event, as well as the more general temporal aspect of forgiveness, is a point of contention between Arendt's, Jankélévitch's, and Derrida's theorizations of forgiveness, as well as an aspect of apparent internal inconsistency. On the one hand, these three thinkers stress that forgiveness is a single, punctual, self-generated occurrence in time. On the other hand, they approach it as the beginning of a process that is not meant to ever end, and for which there is no final outcome.

In her account of forgiveness in *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) refers several times to forgiveness as an event. Moreover, she argues that what differentiates forgiveness and understanding is precisely that the former has a clear ending, while the latter is endless. However, in the same piece she elaborates on forgiveness as an action –

the only re-action that also acts anew, paraphrasing her – and action is conceived of in her project as an endless process, with no definable outcome: “The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of an action is simply that action has no end” (233), except the end of mankind itself. One is then tempted to conclude that, from Arendt’s perspective, acting (and forgiving) can produce multiple outcomes – the unpredictable consequences of one’s actions – but ultimately has no definite outcome.

There is a tension throughout Jankélévitch’s (2005) and Derrida’s (2001) work as well, between forgiveness as an extraordinary occurrence in time and forgiveness as that which should not (Jankélévitch) or cannot (Derrida) be fully accomplished, and thus should or could only remain unfinished. In *Forgiveness*, Jankélévitch (2005) stresses the spontaneous and sudden nature of forgiveness, referring to it as “always a *fiat*, an event, and an act” (35), which is therefore completed. By contrast, in the essay “Should We Pardon Them?” he argues that forgivability and prescriptibility are two sides of the same coin, and therefore, in order for crimes against humanity to be imprescriptible, they should remain unforgiven. Indeed, what makes the wrongdoings eternal is not that they not be forgotten but that they not be forgiven.

Derrida (2001), for his part, establishes a sharp contrast between, on the one hand, genuine forgiveness, and the pragmatic, therapeutic process of reconciliation and “work of mourning” (48), on the other hand. Unlike genuine forgiveness, the “therapy of reconciliation” is grounded on the idea that healing wounds is an achievable outcome. Reconciliation appears in this light as a process that can be successfully completed and amounts to “a reconstitution of a health or a ‘normality’” (*sic*) (50), which is by definition

non-finalized, because it is based on the recognition that the acts that need to be forgiven are precisely those which appear to be unforgivable. In Derrida's (2002) terms,

As soon as the word "pardon!" – the performative of forgiveness as a speech act – is uttered, is there not the beginning of a re-appropriation, a mourning process, a process of redemption, of a transfiguring calculation which, through language, the sharing of language rushes toward the economy of a reconciliation that causes the wrong itself to be simply forgotten or annihilated, and thus this unforgivable as well, this unforgivable that is the only possible correlate of a forgiveness worthy of the name, of an absolutely singular forgiveness as unique event, unique but necessarily iterable, as always? (46)

In this regard, drawing on Derrida's insights, the approach to forgiveness as an event, particularly, as an act accomplished by speaking, a performative utterance that can be successfully completed, cancels the possibility of the unforgivable and thus forgiveness itself, making way for therapeutic reconciliation.⁹ Also, although he shares Jankélévitch's notion that imprescriptibility and unforgivability speak of a certain sense of eternity, Derrida (2001) explicitly rules out the idea that the imprescriptible and the unforgivable are equivalent to one another: "One can maintain the imprescriptibility of a crime, give no limit to the duration of an indictment or a possible pursuit before the law, while still forgiving the guilty. Inversely, one can acquit or suspend judgment and nevertheless refuse to forgive" (33). Therefore, Derrida takes a position against Jankélévitch's assumption in "Should We Pardon Them?" that there is a necessarily positive connection between forgivability and prescriptibility.

9. Interestingly, Digeser (2001), who claims that political forgiveness amounts to an act that can be successfully performed and thus completed, approaches it as an *illocutionary* act. This implies that, as a speech act, it is understood and it effects the acquittal of the debtor from the debt, and is precisely what Derrida rules out of his conceptualization of forgiveness.

3. Forgiveness as a relationship between two parties

The third aspect of the survivors' statements quoted above refers to their exclusive right to forgive, only if and when they feel compelled to forgive their victimizers. In this regard, conceiving of forgiveness as involving a third party – for instance, an institutional actor mediating between victim and perpetrator – may undermine the victim's dignity.

Derrida, Jankélévitch, and Arendt all refer to forgiveness as a kind of relation that is personal and immediate (literally meaning not mediated). Therefore, the intervention of third parties in the scheme of forgiveness would interfere with the very direct connection upon which forgiveness rests between the offender and the offended. Derrida (2001), for instance, argues that pure forgiveness cannot be granted or asked by a third party acting on behalf of victims or perpetrators, respectively. Particularly, forgiveness cannot be granted on behalf of the absolute victims, that is, those who did not survive the wrongdoing: “the *disappeared*, in essence, are themselves never absolutely present, at the moment when forgiveness is asked for, the same as they were at the moment of the crime, and they are sometimes absent in body, often dead” (44). Jankélévitch (1996), for his part, radically rules out the possibility that survivors forgive on behalf of other survivors: “everyone is free to pardon the offenses that he has personally suffered if he chooses to, but those of others, what right does he have to pardon them?” (569).

In addition to the practical issue regarding the physical absence of the direct victims, there is a conceptual issue around the parties involved in a social process of forgiveness: there is often no way to ascertain that the will of those who are currently asking or granting forgiveness is aligned with the will of those who perpetrated or

directly suffered the crimes committed. In fact, as Thompson (2010) points out, “the perpetrators in most cases showed no sign of remorse during their lifetimes.” Furthermore, “who knows whether the victims would have been prepared to forgive” (267).

Also, although they start from the same premise – that forgiveness is not an exchange, and they describe the relationship of forgiveness in similar terms, by comparing it to a gift – Jankélévitch (2005) and Derrida (2001) have nuanced views regarding these ideas. Jankélévitch (2005) claims, on the one hand, that forgiveness is a gift in that it consists of graciously giving something to someone.¹⁰ It is therefore a gesture that does not arise in response to the other’s actions. On the other hand, he argues that forgiveness is essentially an intention, addressed towards the other. Furthermore, he claims that unlike remorse, which is a soliloquy, “forgiveness is a dialogue, a relation between two partners in which one waits for something from the other” (121). Forgiveness is thus presented, at the same time, as a gratuitous gift and a dialogue underpinned by intentions. In this regard, it is at odds with time in that, unlike the latter, forgiveness does not only have an intention, but it has an intention that is oriented towards someone: “time looks at the future, but it does not look at the other” (2005, 37). Moreover, Jankélévitch distinguishes between true forgiveness and excuse because “the intellectual excuse [...] is neither an event, nor a personal relation with the Other, nor a gratuitous gift” (61). Excuse does not admit that there was an offense and does not

10. Later in the book, Jankélévitch (2005) seems to put into question the metaphor of a gift as an accurate account of his understanding of forgiveness as the radical act of giving something to someone for no reason at all. “Forgiveness, in the end, differs from the gift; for the gift is after all a partitive and fragmented misappropriation. For the donor of this gift never relinquishes anything but his assets or a portion of his assets. Forgiveness, in contrast, forgives in one fell swoop and in a single, indivisible *élan*, and it pardons undividedly . . .” (153).

recognize an offender and an offended. Unlike clemency, which recognizes an offender but not an offended party – it is “forgiveness that has no interlocutor” (6) – excuse is “both indifferent to the wrongs of the Other and insensitive to the presence of the other” (8). The emphasis on the role of alterity in forgiveness, and the reciprocal approach to forgiveness as primarily an intention directed towards the other, balances the conceptualization of forgiveness as an almost self-generated event, whose main character is the forgiver.

From Derrida’s perspective, forgiveness can be approached as a gift in that it constitutes an unconditional act. However, as mentioned above, an act can hardly be conceptualized as unconditional and “aneconomic” at the same time. By unconditionally giving, people are necessarily participating in an exchange, and forgiveness is not an exchange – it cannot be given to someone or by someone (Lotz, 2006). In Thompson’s (2010) analysis of Derrida, for instance, while forgiveness follows a past occurrence, it is not a response given by the offended to the offender’s misdeed, since it is “(...) offered without considering the cost or whether the recipient merits the act, and without consideration of how he/she will respond” (260). Therefore, unlike Jankélévitch, Derrida argues that forgiveness has no intention behind it.

Arendt (1998), for her part, examines forgiveness as a personal – “though not necessarily individual or private” (241) – relationship between two people who are distinguished from being “merely humans” by their ability to articulate the faculties of thinking and speaking (2003). Although in *The Human Condition* Arendt (1998) argues that we forgive something, not someone, the thinker’s position in this regard seems to have changed in *Responsibility and Judgment*. As she puts it, “(...) in granting pardon, it

is the person and not the crime that is forgiven; in rootless evil there is no person left whom one could ever forgive” (2003, 95). The change in her perspective on forgiveness is thus accompanied by a change in her view on evil. By introducing the notion of rootless evil, Arendt (2003) openly rejects her previous conceptualization of “radical evil”: “the greatest evil is not radical, it has no roots, and because it has no roots it has no limitations” (95). In sum, Arendt argues that in rootless evil there is no one to forgive, because the offender gave up his being a person, when he chose to not remember his past misdeeds. Two possible interpretations unfold from this. Either in these circumstances, in which there cannot be a personal relationship, the only thing that can possibly be forgiven is the fault, or rootless evil is simply unforgivable. The first interpretation would reveal a striking change in Arendt’s thought on forgiveness in her later writings, as gathered together in *Responsibility and Judgment*, if compared with, for instance, her position in *The Human Condition*, where she puts aside the question of forgiveness in the context of major wrongdoings, by arguing that those are humanly unforgivable misdeeds. The second interpretation, by contrast, would show a consistent position through Arendt’s writings regarding forgiveness, expressed in the idea that there are offenses that are, and are to remain, unforgivable.

Derrida (2001) also wonders about the “whom” and the “what” of forgiveness: “Does one forgive something [...], an act or a moment which does not exhaust the person incriminated, and at the limit does not become confused with the guilty, who thus remains irreducible to it? Or rather, does one forgive someone . . . ?” And if we forgive the person, “does one ask forgiveness of the victim, or some absolute witness, of God . . .

?” (38). However, faced with these questions, he chooses to neither answer nor examine them in depth: “I must leave these immense questions open” (38).

When Derrida (2001) rules out the engagement of a third party in pure forgiveness, however, he is not only referring to the role played by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, for instance, but also to the role potentially played by other institutions such as language.¹¹ Here, language is not only understood as “national language or an idiom,” but is more broadly conceptualized as “an agreement on the meanings of the words” (48), that is, a shared linguistic background.

When the victim and the guilty share no language, when nothing common and universal permits them to understand one another, forgiveness seems deprived of meaning; it is certainly a case of the absolutely unforgivable, that impossibility of forgiveness, of which we just said nevertheless that it was, paradoxically, the very element of all possible forgiveness. (48)

In other words, the introduction of a common language between victims and perpetrators¹² eliminates the possibility of forgiveness itself by putting into question its unconditionality and thus, its potential impossibility. Moreover, expressing forgiveness through the universal institution of language puts in jeopardy the singularity of the decision of forgiveness (and of acts of morality in general), to which we referred above

11. Based on the idea that genuine forgiveness is to occur only between two singularities, Derrida (2001) examines and criticizes the work of the South African TRC. According to him, under Tutu, the Commission tried to force a Christian-inspired scheme of forgiveness designed for two singularities, into a three-party scheme (including a mediating institutional actor represented, for instance, by the TRC itself). In this scheme, Derrida says, reconciliation and closure may occur, but forgiveness cannot, because public institutions have neither the power nor the right to forgive. Derrida claims that Tutu “christianised the language of an institution uniquely destined to treat ‘politically’ motivated crimes” by introducing “the vocabulary of repentance and forgiveness” (242). (In fact, Tutu (1999) acknowledges that the reason why he was involved in the TRC was his faith: “we were being religious, not political” (93).) Following Derrida, then, one of the South African TRC’s main flaws would have been to approach crimes involving multiple actors, individual and institutional, from a religious perspective, pushing those affected by such crimes to be part of a collective Christian narrative of past wrongdoings and forgiveness.

12. The Christian language in the case of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission could be an example.

(Lotz, 2006). Ultimately, in order to remain a real, singular decision, forgiveness should remain non-expressed and thus, potentially incomprehensible. Therefore, again, Derrida's approach sheds light on the paradoxical situation in which the moral agents involved in forgiveness are caught. On the one hand, forgiveness is a relationship between two parties; on the other hand, these parties are and should remain singularities, heterogeneous to each other, in order for pure forgiveness to remain a possibility. How can two singularities establish a relationship without risking their being singularities?

Arendt's, Jankélévitch's, and Derrida's conceptualizations of forgiveness have a privileged place in the limited contemporary literature on forgiveness in political philosophy. It is noteworthy that none of the three provide a systematic, overarching account of the ethics of forgiveness. On the contrary, their theorizations on forgiveness are pervaded by tensions or apparent paradoxes (*aporias*). Perhaps this is precisely what makes these approaches so compelling: their ability to grasp forgiveness in its elusiveness, as existing in the tension between contingency and unconditionality. The three aspects of forgiveness presented above shed light on this tension, which at the same time constitutes the basis for conceptualizing forgiveness in the public sphere and limits its possibility.

In the next section, I discuss a way out from the tragic – but certainly fruitful – tension between the simultaneously contingent and unconditional character of forgiveness, between the conceptual impossibility of forgiveness and its practical possibility. I will do that, firstly, by building upon Arendt's notion of collective responsibility, which – I claim – overcomes one of the weaknesses of Derrida's and Jankélévitch's approaches to forgiveness: their inability to effectively call to political

action in the aftermath of major wrongdoings. Secondly, I bring up Arendt's concept of understanding and Hegel's concept of forgiveness, both connected with self-reconciliation, and I propose that they inform the conceptualization of political forgiveness.

B. From tragedy to responsibility: political forgiveness as self-reconciliation

1. Assessing Arendt's, Jankélévitch's, and Derrida's theorizations of forgiveness

If in Arendt's philosophical project, forgiveness – along with the faculty to make promises – appears as a response to the tragic nature of action and engenders tragedy again, in Jankélévitch's and Derrida's work forgiveness *is* a tragedy in itself: in its pure, absolute form, it exists *qua* paradox, since forgiveness remains a possibility as long as there is an unforgivable wrongdoing. In an equally paradoxical fashion, the tragedy of forgiveness is that which engenders responsibility.

In fact, the *aporia* of forgiveness may be interpreted as a version of Derrida's (2001) *aporia* of responsibility. As Derrida puts it, “the *aporia* is the *experience* of responsibility. It is only by *going through* a set of contradictory injunctions, impossible choices, that we make a choice”¹³ (Bernstein 2006, 403, quoting Derrida). Moreover, in

13. Italics are Bernstein's, not Derrida's.

his essay “On Forgiveness”, Derrida (2001) refers to the importance of the insoluble for the experience of responsibility:

There is, there *has* to be, it must be accepted, the ‘insoluble’. In politics and beyond. When the givens of a problem or a task do not appear as infinitely contradictory, placing me before the *aporia* of a double injunction, then I *know* in advance what is necessary to do, I believe the knowledge, this knowledge commands and programs the action: it is done, there is no more decision or responsibility to take. (53)

Responsibility thus exists in the *limbo* where any form of anticipation is precluded, knowledge is incomplete, and a decision is required. According to Derrida (2001), responsibility does not require that one not know, but that one be aware that between knowledge and decision there is, and there must remain, “an abyss” (53). This is the same abyss that exists between the two irreducibly heterogeneous but indissociable poles of the unconditional, ahistorical, apolitical nature of pure forgiveness and the historical, political conditions in which forgiveness would practically occur: “it is between these two poles [...] that decisions and responsibilities are to be taken” (45).

Derrida’s notion of the insoluble is closely related to his concept of the undecidable, examined above. It could be said that the single experience of the undecidable takes place in the context of insolubility as the permanent condition of the political and non-political world – as if the undecidable were the instantaneous photograph and the insoluble were the landscape to be portrayed.

As paradoxical as it is, for Derrida the undecidable and the insoluble are thus the foundations of decision and responsibility as ethical actions. In other words, the impossible – the impossibility of making a decision or solving a problem – is at the core of ethics: it is actually the condition of possibility of ethics itself.

The absolutely ethical action is impossible *as* an ethical action [meaning an action that may be justified in public and thus convey a generalizable responsibility]; yet, without this impossibility, it appears that the very notion of ethical action – as a decision taken as if in response to an absolute command – loses its force. (Hollander 2013, 141)

In the same vein, Acosta López (2012), in her interpretation of Hegel, points out that an action is only ethical insofar as it is transgressive, that is, as it expresses the agent's individuality in the world. This recalls what was pointed out above regarding the decision of forgiveness as an exceptional moment that does not amount to the application of any universal, previous rule or knowledge, precisely because that decision is a manifestation of the singularity of the moral agent in the world.

What are the implications of this approach for the theorization of forgiveness? In order to be an authentically responsible decision, forgiveness needs to be experienced by the ethical agent in its aporetic dimension. Moreover, by formulating forgiveness in terms of an *aporia*, Derrida puts into question the idea that “something that is beyond our powers cannot impose responsibilities on us” (Thompson 2010, 273), similar to Arendt (2003) who states that we can be held responsible for that which we have not done: “there is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them” (147). Considering the conceptualization of forgiveness that places the dilemma between the unconditional and the contingent at its core, Derrida argues that our responsibility as ethical agents is not to solve this dilemma, but to declare it to the other, accepting a task where we are, in Derrida's own words, “irreplaceable”:

The only responsibility I cannot escape is to declare to the other this dilemma; it is to take the initiative, as I do here, of this declaration and to commit myself to drawing its juridical, ethical, political, and historical consequences. [...] without expecting reciprocity, alone and there where I am irreplaceable in this responsibility. (Hollander 2013, 151, quoting Derrida's essay “Avowing”)

All in all, both Derrida's approach on forgiveness and Jankélévitch's in *Le Pardon* may be read as an alternative to Arendt's most systematic theorization of forgiveness – the one she provides in *The Human Condition* – because they bestow upon forgiveness a role in the context of apparently unforgivable wrongdoings, while Arendt leaves these wrongdoings out of her theory of forgiveness. However, both Derrida and Jankélévitch lack a *political* approach to forgiveness.

In fact, none of the three approaches to forgiveness examined here grasps the specific dynamics of this phenomenon in the public sphere, that is, as a political phenomenon. The notion that forgiveness requires two parties and that the involvement of a third party distorts its genuineness and may undermine the victim's dignity shows that political forgiveness is generally conceptualized against the backdrop of interpersonal forgiveness.¹⁴ Jankélévitch approaches forgiveness as mostly pertaining to the realm of interpersonal relationships, while Arendt and Derrida elaborate on the idea of forgiveness in the public sphere, but they often do so through the theoretical lenses meant to grasp the dynamics of interpersonal forgiveness. The same can probably be said regarding apology in general and political apology. As pointed out in the previous chapter, in order to reflect on this phenomenon as it occurs in the public space, it is necessary to consider third parties – at least the audience. Since it was argued that a political apology amounts to the collective co-creation of stories of responsibility, which may involve multiple parties, and since political apology is conceptualized here as a gesture that contributes to setting the stage for political forgiveness, the latter cannot be a question of two parties; otherwise it

14. The only exception to a two-party scheme of forgiveness as a non-political relationship probably is the involvement of God as the third party (Daye 2004).

would not be *political*. This said, political forgiveness as it is conceptualized in this work does not preclude or rely on interpersonal forgiveness.

Thinking about political forgiveness as involving more than two parties does not cancel the paradoxes mentioned above regarding the nature of forgiveness as a relationship. Furthermore, elaborating on forgiveness as it occurs in the public space by pointing out how it differs and how it overlaps with interpersonal forgiveness is certainly an enriching exercise. Yet, it does not shed light on the specificities of political forgiveness.

Also, in all three projects it is unclear how forgiveness and political responsibility interact. Derrida (2001) goes as far as claiming that the unconditionality of forgiveness is “apolitical” (50). In addition, as mentioned above, Derrida argues that, since forgiveness does not belong to the order of exchange, it can happen, but we cannot know when or where (Lotz 2006). Therefore, from his perspective, there is nothing that political actors could or should do in the face of forgiveness, beyond acknowledging the *aporia* of responsibility in which they are caught.

Moreover, Derrida’s (2001) own political position before the ideal event of forgiveness and the empirical processes of reconciliation as it appears in his essay “On Forgiveness” is deeply puzzling for the reader. On the one hand, he declares: “I remain ‘torn’ (between a ‘hyperbolic’ ethical vision of forgiveness, pure forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation). But without power, desire, or need to decide” (51). On the other hand, Derrida advocates for these pragmatic processes to be oriented by a hyperbolic sense of forgiveness. In this regard, Derrida’s idea of forgiveness lies somewhere between analytical-conceptual

impossibility/unconditionality and practical possibility/contingency, and between moral desirability and undesirability. His idea of forgiveness exists in the “abyss” mentioned above.

If, as Thompson (2010) suggests, “Derrida regards the impossible as a limit concept” and “a limit is something that can be approached – not reached” (271), then theorizing forgiveness at the edge of the impossible means that, in its pure form, forgiveness is only conceivable at a conceptual, analytical level. It does not mean that its practical existence under “impure” forms is not possible, but it does mean that forgiveness cannot be practiced as it is conceptually conceived. Likewise, Derrida claims hyperbolic forgiveness to be the backdrop against which any pragmatic expression of forgiveness is to be measured, but the mad act of forgiveness in purity is morally undesirable because it would mean that moral agents give up on their responsibility to think about the consequences of their actions (Thompson 2010). Mad forgiveness may thus be the only pure version of forgiveness, but it would also be an immoral one (if it were possible to put into practice). Not only is it the case that pure forgiveness may not become a practical reality, it *should* not, for the sake of responsibility itself. In sum, Derrida’s piece gives the reader a temporary hope that she can assume responsibility even for those wrongdoings that are beyond her ability to respond, by performing an act of madness – perhaps the only one that could come close to accounting for their severity. However, what makes this act conceivable (although only in the analytical realm) also makes it practically impossible and morally inadvisable, and therefore politically meaningless. As pointed out above, from Derrida’s approach, forgiveness in its pure form only exists as an insurmountable paradox, and thus, as a tragedy.

Because they theorize forgiveness in the public sphere in the aftermath of major wrongdoings, one would expect Jankélévitch's *Forgiveness* and Derrida's work to be a call to political action in those contexts. However, they do not establish a bridge between past wrongdoings and present political responsibility (beyond Derrida's call to declare to the other the ethical dilemma between the unconditional and the contingent). Therefore, Derrida's and Jankélévitch's theorizations of forgiveness present the post-conflict context as inescapably tragic.

By contrast, Arendt's conceptualization of forgiveness could easily be seen as being at odds with any invitation to act politically after atrocities have been committed and the public space silenced. In fact, while it is supposed to be a response to the tragedy of action, her theorization of forgiveness (and promise) falls into tragedy again and leaves out major wrongdoings. However, I claim that Arendt moves beyond tragedy, and towards political action, when she theorizes political responsibility in the aftermath of major wrongdoings through her conceptualization of collective responsibility.

2. On the relationship between understanding and forgiveness: Hegel and Arendt meet

In her essay "Understanding and Politics" (1994), Arendt claims that the meaning of an event is revealed after its end, because only then the event appears as a new beginning: "the event illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it" (319). Reciprocally, in *Men in Dark Times* (1995), Arendt refers to the relevance of what she calls the process of "tragic recognition" to constitute events as such, by triggering anew

the suffering for the past occurrence.¹⁵ Tragic recognition happens, for instance, but not only, in face of tragic storytelling:

The tragic hero becomes knowledgeable by re-experiencing what has been done in the way of suffering, and in this *pathos*, in re-suffering the past, the network of individual acts is transformed into an event, a significant whole. [...] even non-tragic plots become genuine events only when they are experienced a second time in the form of suffering by memory. (20)

In sum, in Arendt's view of history as an endless sequence of beginnings, whereby human beings – who are themselves beginnings – start by being born and by acting, tragic recognition has the potential to constitute historical events as such and to contribute to their understanding, by re-awaking in our memory the suffering that accompanied them.

If acting is to start something new among other human beings, understanding is what reconciles the acting being with the world in which he lives. It is the attempt to make oneself at home that never fully succeeds, but cannot be given up, because it is, in the author's terms, "the specifically human way of being alive" (Arendt 1994a, 308). From this perspective, understanding is the only partial remedy to the inescapable feeling of being a stranger – the downside of uniqueness. It makes the acting being come to terms with everything that is and that was within this world. We cannot master the past or undo it, but "we can reconcile ourselves to it" (Arendt 1995, 21). Particularly, tragedy has a role to play in understanding. Arendt refers to the "tragic effect" as "the shattering emotion which makes one able to accept the fact that something like this [...] could have

15. Klusmeyer (2009) points out that Arendt's concept of tragic recognition draws on Aristotle's approach to tragedy as having a cathartic effect on the audience and Hegel's view of tragedy "as a collision of opposing ethical positions that is resolved through the death of the tragic hero" (336).

happened at all” (20).¹⁶ In this regard, Arendt’s tragic recognition can be described “as a cathartic process effected through storytelling by which we can be reconciled with painful realities from our past” (Klusmeyer 2009, 336).

Although Arendt sees the potential of a tragic approach to history for helping us reconcile ourselves with the world in which we live, she also sees that such an approach implies considering people as historical victims, instead of political actors subject to collective responsibility – a responsibility that could be politically assumed, as citizens. Even if we accept Arendt’s position in *The Human Condition* that major wrongdoings are unforgivable in the realm of human affairs, people are called to assume responsibility for them – beyond what they are actually guilty for, what they have actually done. In this regard, I argue that Arendt moves *beyond* tragedy *through* tragedy. She moves *beyond* tragedy because she enables responsibility in the context of major wrongdoings, thus positing political action as a response to the apparently inescapable (tragic) circle of paralyzing ethical paradoxes that supervene those wrongdoings. And she moves beyond tragedy *through* tragedy because she claims that a tragic approach to history that actually recalls the experience of the misdeed and its painful consequences, contributes to understanding them. In the following pages I argue that there is a positive connection between understanding and collective responsibility – something that Arendt does not claim in her project, but that I think is consistent with it and actually furthers it, in addition to advancing the case for a political approach to forgiveness. This positive

16. Like Arendt (1995), Jankélévitch (1996) points to the need and the difficulties of doing what Arendt refers to as “making oneself at home in this world” when it comes to the Holocaust: “For that was possible. This crime without a name is a truly infinite crime whose horror deepens the more it is analyzed” (558).

relationship can be ventured because of the positive connection between understanding and totalitarianism, and between collective responsibility and totalitarianism.

“If we want to be at home on this earth,” Arendt writes, “even at the price of being at home in this century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with the essence of totalitarianism” (1994, 323). Because “understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results” (308), one can expect major wrongdoings – like the ones associated with totalitarianism – to never be completely understood. Nonetheless, we must try to understand them, even while we keep fighting them. Indeed, Arendt makes it clear that we do not need to understand the whole phenomenon of totalitarianism to fight it, but just “one thing: Totalitarianism is the most radical denial of freedom” (328). And this “one thing” that we need to understand about totalitarianism in order to fight it, is not essential to understanding totalitarianism itself. At the same time, the notion of collective responsibility in her project can hardly be dissociated from her analysis of totalitarianism.

In her essay “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (1994), where she examines the case of administrative mass murder under the Third Reich, Arendt argues that if every German is considered guilty, “nobody in the last analysis can be judged” (126), because this would imply judging every German citizen. However, the duty to assume collective responsibility cannot be given up. Recalling Arendt’s (2003) words on collective responsibility, “two conditions have to be present for collective responsibility: I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve” (149). Unlike “moral and/or legal (personal) guilt” (151), which

always points towards a person and her act, collective responsibility is a political matter (as opposed to a personal matter) and stems from “intentions or potentialities” (147). According to this, while not every German is to be considered guilty for what happened, Germans share a (collective) responsibility for the crimes committed under Nazism.

Although Jankélévitch (1996) agrees with Arendt (2003) when he expresses that “if everyone is guilty, no one is guilty” (563) – expressed by Arendt as “where all are guilty, nobody is” (2003, 147) – in his essay “Should We Pardon Them?” (1996) Jankélévitch sharply criticizes some of Arendt’s insights on the Holocaust, without ever mentioning her directly. Apart from disagreeing with the interpretation she advanced in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1994b) about the complicity of Jewish leaders with the atrocities carried out by the Nazis (“To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story” (Arendt 1994b, 117)), Jankélévitch (1996) puts into question the concept of collective responsibility as presented by Arendt, and refers instead to the idea of “national responsibility”:

A crime that was perpetrated in the name of German superiority engages the national responsibility of all Germans. [...] To say that it will still take a long time to discover all of the complex ramifications of the crime is not to say that all Germans are *collectively* responsible or are responsible inasmuch as they are Germans. (565)

Other than the fact that Jankélévitch’s difference between “national responsibility” and “collective responsibility” is unclear – in both cases the responsibility belongs to *all Germans* – Jankélévitch’s criticism of Arendt’s concept of collective responsibility does not overshadow the latter’s potential to be a call to political action. In this regard, collective responsibility not only means that we are morally liable for what happened –

paraphrasing Václav Havel's words about totalitarianism, we are never only the victims of atrocities, we are always, as well, somehow, its co-creators.¹⁷ Collective responsibility also means that we are morally liable for what happens in the present and what will happen in the future with regard to past wrongdoings.¹⁸ Moreover, as long as collective responsibility is differentiated from collective guilt – which is inconceivable because guilt is an individual phenomenon – the notion of collective responsibility remains an interesting alternative to both the idea that everyone is guilty,¹⁹ and so nobody is, and the demonization of a nation as such for the atrocities carried out by some of its members.²⁰

Considering the preceding analysis of the relationship between understanding and collective responsibility in Arendt's work, a response to totalitarianism calls for both, and

17. In a speech he delivered on January 1st, 1990 in Prague, Václav Havel (1994), who was the President of Czechoslovakia between 1989 and 1992, and the President of the Czech Republic between 1993 and 2003, expressed: "I am talking about all of us. We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unalterable fact of life, and thus we helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all – though naturally to different extents – responsible for the operation of totalitarian machinery. None of us is just a victim: we are all also its co-creators" (1994, 4).

18. In a speech to the *Bundestag* in support of a day of commemoration for the victims of National Socialism, on January 19, 1996, Roman Herzog, who was the President of Germany between 1994 and 1999, stated with regard to collective responsibility. "It goes in two directions: first of all, remembrance must not cease: without remembrance, evil cannot be overcome and conclusions cannot be drawn for the future. On the other hand, collective responsibility aims specifically at the implementation of these conclusions, which always leads to the same thing: democracy, rule of law, human rights, and human dignity" (American Institute for Contemporary German Studies 1997, 17).

19. Václav Havel (1994) himself said in a speech in Prague on March 15, 1990: "to accept the idea of collective guilt and collective responsibility means directly or unwittingly to weaken the guilt or responsibility of individuals. And that is very dangerous. [...] Simply being Czech or Slovak or German or Vietnamese or Jewish does not make us good or bad" (1994, 26).

20. In his speech to the *Bundestag* on January 19, 1996, Herzog also stated: "we cannot recognize the collective guilt of the German people for the crimes of the National Socialism. An admission of this kind would, at the very least, not do justice to those who risked their lives, freedom, and health in the fight against National Socialism and in support of its victims and whose legacy is the system of government in which we live today. However, there is a collective responsibility . . ." (American Institute for Contemporary German Studies 1997, 17).

consequently, those concepts are not at odds with each other. The question remains as to the extent of the role understanding plays in assuming collective responsibility.

Unlike collective responsibility and understanding, the relation between understanding and forgiveness in Arendt's project is one of total contrast. According to Arendt (1994), "forgiving [...] is a single action and culminates in a single act," while "understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results" (308). The idea that the pursuit of meaning is to remain non-finalized is also central to Derrida's approach to forgiveness – and, more generally, to his deconstructive approach. Furthermore, Derrida (2001) argues that, as much as its being a madness of the impossible is its condition of possibility, the meaning of pure forgiveness stems from its having no finalized meaning, that is, from its lack of finality, which puts it out of the realm of the understandable, making it unintelligible. In other words, one of the foundations of Derrida's conceptualization of forgiveness as madness is that pure forgiveness can only occur in the presence of an irreducible non-identification and thus incomprehension between the offender and the offended. "As soon as the victim 'understands' the criminal [...], the scene of reconciliation has commenced, and with it this ordinary forgiveness which is anything but forgiveness" (2001, 49).

Moreover, for Derrida (2001) and Jankélévitch (2005), understanding leads to reconciliation and excuse, respectively, and is, from this perspective, at odds with forgiveness. Specifically, for both thinkers the process of understanding introduces a third party between the two who are supposed to be the only ones involved in pure forgiveness: "Even if I say 'I do not forgive you' to someone who asks my forgiveness, but whom I understand and who understands me, then a process of reconciliation has begun; the third

has intervened” (Derrida 2001, 49). Like for Derrida, who argues that the “third” can be language, in Jankélévitch (2005) the third party is not necessarily a tangible institution or person, but rather an “anonymous universality” (68) that enables comprehension between the offender and the offended. However, unlike Arendt, who stresses that we should work toward the understanding even of that which we cannot humanly forgive, Jankélévitch emphasizes that what needs to be forgiven – the evil intention of the wrongdoer – is precisely what cannot be understood, “for the chasms of pure wickedness [what Arendt would probably call “the radical evil”] are incomprehensible” (67). By attempting to understand wickedness, one enters the realm of the intellectual excuse, which is not forgiveness, but just a type of “pseudo-forgiveness.”

Nonetheless, it is interesting how Jankélévitch (2005) nuances his view on the negative connection between forgiveness and understanding, both from the perspective of the victim and the trespasser. Thinking of forgiveness as experienced by the offended party, Jankélévitch claims that “forgiveness does not forgive *because* it understands; but first it forgives without reasons, and then, in a certain way, it understands or guesses” (159). Also, “forgiveness does not understand what it understands and understands what it does not understand. This empty intellection of the incomprehensible is forgiveness itself . . . ” (160). According to this, although the incomprehensible – and contradiction – are at the core of forgiveness the latter also has the ability to trigger an “ex-post” understanding. This argument puts into question Arendt’s claim that forgiveness and understanding are at odds with each other because the former is an event and the latter is an endless process. Indeed, if understanding comes, potentially, after forgiveness, there is no interference between forgiveness being an act and understanding remaining a non-

finalized process. Moreover, unlike Derrida, who refers uniquely to the understanding of the offender by the victim (and how it inaugurates an undesirable reconciliation), Jankélévitch (1996) points to the understanding of the offended party by the trespasser. “Certainly we [the victims of the Holocaust] did not expect that they [German people] would beg our forgiveness. But the understanding word, we would have received it with gratitude, with tears in our eyes” (567).

If, for Arendt, understanding and collective responsibility are somehow positively related – or at least not clearly opposed to one another – and forgiveness is at odds with understanding, one could infer that forgiveness and collective responsibility are hardly reconcilable in her eyes. I believe this deserves further analysis. It is interesting that Arendt defines understanding in the same terms in which Hegel refers to forgiveness – as a self-reconciling activity. According to Hegel (1977), forgiveness amounts to a “reconciling yes” of the self with itself: “The reconciling Yea, in which the two ‘I’s let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the ‘I’ which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself (...)” (409). In the essay “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate”, Hegel (1971) refers to forgiveness specifically as the expression of reconciliation with one’s own fate.

Law restores justice by establishing the equality between crime and punishment, between the trespasser’s deed and the rights of the offended that he has cancelled, and that he has now cancelled for himself. In fact, punishment and justice are presented by Hegel (1971) as being close to vengeance: “tyrants are confronted by torturers, murderers by executioners. The torturers and executioners, who do the same as the tyrants and the

murderers did, are called *just*, simply because they give like for like” (238). Yet law and punishment cannot be reconciled. Since the deed cannot be undone, it is not possible to remove the contradiction or restore the wholeness between the universality of law and the particularity of the deed, between objectivity and subjectivity. As Hegel puts it, “the law is satisfied when the trespasser is punished [...] Only the trespasser is not reconciled with the law, whether the law is in his eyes something alien, or whether it is present in him as a bad conscience [...] (the consciousness of a bad action, of one’s self as a bad man)” (227). Paraphrasing Hegel, in the first scenario, although the effects of law as a power acting on the trespasser cease, it still appears to the latter as a threatening power. In the second case, punishment has no effect on the trespasser’s bad conscience, since, despite being punished, he remains aware of the law and of the violation of it which he incurred.

In sum, while law restores justice by establishing a punishment whose severity aims at equating the severity of the crime, law cannot be reconciled with punishment; that is, the contradiction between the universal concept of law and its particular reality cannot be cancelled. However, law and punishment, Hegel (1971) says, “can be transcended if fate can be reconciled” (228). In reconciling themselves with their fate, offended and offender sense the loss of wholeness – also referred to by Hegel as “life,” or even as an expression of the absolute – following the misdeed. Although this loss is experienced negatively, it is also a “sensing of life,” which Hegel identifies as an experience of love. The latter plays, in turn, an essential role in reconciling fate – and thus in forgiveness: “It is in the fact that even the enemy is felt as life that there lies the possibility of reconciling fate” (232). In other words, it is precisely in the opposition between the hostile experience of the loss of wholeness and the experience of it as a connection with life,

where the possibility of the continuity of life lies, through the reunion of the opposites.²¹

In Acosta López's (2012) reading of Hegel, forgiveness

is neither the replacement of punishment, nor the cancellation of the deed. It is rather the possibility of introducing an alternative point of view for those actions that, even if they could not have been avoided, neither could they be erased or repaired, have to be recognized as one's own before the other, before those we have transgressed. The young Hegel will describe this idea as reconciliation, through love, with one's own destiny (58).²²

To summarize, both forgiveness in the sense of Hegel and understanding in the sense of Arendt can be defined in terms of reconciliation, but not reconciliation with someone else – like the reconciliation that Derrida suggests attempts to bring closure and to which he refers as being at odds with forgiveness. The activity of understanding for Arendt and the act of forgiving for Hegel refer to reconciliation with oneself, whether trespasser or offended party. Moreover, both Hegel's and Arendt's approaches recognize the tragic side of self-reconciliation, but move beyond it when they argue that the realm of self-reconciliation in social life (whether it be called forgiveness like in Hegel, or understanding like in Arendt) goes far and above that which can be treated within the sphere of law and justice. In other words, self-reconciliation goes beyond punishment –

21. It is interesting to rethink the Hegelian approach to justice, fate, and forgiveness for the case of trespassers who do not recognize themselves as such, as Adolph Eichmann. In her report on Eichmann's trial, what Arendt emphasizes is precisely that in Eichmann's consciousness there is no contradiction between law and his actions, but exactly the opposite. It follows from this that for Eichmann there is neither a sensing of the loss of wholeness following the crime, nor an experience of love and reconciliation with his fate, nor forgiveness.

22. This claim is contentious. In fact, not only does Hegel (1971) argue that there is something alien to law and justice to be considered in the aftermath of a misdeed in order for wholeness to be re-established; one could argue that he goes as far as suggesting that in such a context, justice be replaced with love and forgiveness. "A man would be entangled in a fate by another's deed if he picked up the gauntlet and insisted on his right against the transgressor; but this fate is turned aside if he surrenders the right and clings to love" (238). Both Hegel – who, as mentioned above, traces a link between revenge and punishment – and Jankélévitch (2005) seem to agree that forgiveness amounts to the renunciation of vengeance, but also of justice. "Not only does the one who forgives not avenge himself now, not only does he renounce all future vengeance, but he renounces justice itself!" says Jankélévitch in *Forgiveness* (119).

we still need to attempt to reconcile ourselves when the misdeed cannot be fairly punished – and/or beyond criminal guilt. Indeed, Arendtian collective responsibility (and understanding) applies to what we have not done and Hegelian fate (and forgiveness) also comes into play for that which we have done “innocently,” as is the case of tragic heroes. As Hegel puts it: “[Fate] is aroused even by guilt without crime, and hence it is stricter than punishment. Its strictness often seems to pass over into the most crying injustice when it makes its appearance [...], over against the most exalted form of guilt, the guilt of innocence” (1971, 233). He elaborates on how fate is “stricter” than punishment:

I mean that, since laws are purely conceptual unifications of opposites, these concepts are far from exhausting the many-sidedness of life. Punishment exercises its domination only insofar as there is a consciousness of life at the point where a disunion has been reunified *conceptually*; but over the relations of life which have not been dissolved, over the sides of life which are given as *vitally* united, over the domain of virtues, it exercises no power. (233)

It could be thus said that Hegelian fate involves a sense of responsibility, to be assumed beyond one’s intentions, for one’s misdeeds even when these cannot be punished in the legal realm. Furthermore, both collective responsibility and individual fate are inescapable – in fact, collective responsibility stems from a non-chosen belonging to a political community and fate refers by its etymology to the determined character of the course of a life.

Although there is no way out from collective responsibility and fate, self-reconciliation is a way *through*, and perhaps the only possible re-action in the face of wrongdoings that challenge the legal boundaries of punishment and criminal guilt. From this perspective, self-reconciliation (as the core of the activity of understanding in Arendt and the act of forgiving in Hegel) appears as the way through the multiple tragic situations arising in the aftermath of major wrongdoings. As Hirsch (2012) recalls, those

are unsolvable situations that nonetheless require action. “The goal is to salvage from the wreckage of the situation enough narrative unity for the self to go on” (54). Again in this statement, as in Arendt’s conceptualization of tragic recognition, telling the story behind the individual’s and the community’s suffering plays a key role in understanding the wrongdoing – which I claim is entangled with forgiveness through self-reconciliation.

I argued above that both Derrida’s view on forgiveness and Jankélévitch’s work in *Le Pardon* leave a limited space for actual political action in the aftermath of major wrongdoings because they present this context as insurmountably tragic, with no possible connection to political responsibility. I believe that Hegel’s approach to forgiveness provides an alternative to these approaches in this regard. In his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, according to Acosta López, Hegel’s argument is that “forgiveness makes its appearance precisely in order to make the experience of the absence of any definitive resolution and, nonetheless, to take it to the point where the possibility of togetherness has to somehow be re-established” (Acosta López 2012, 57). This approach where forgiveness and the tragedy of the insoluble converge for the sake of re-constituting the political community synthesizes the complexity of Jankélévitch’s and Derrida’s approaches to forgiveness in the public sphere as a tension between the unconditional and the contingent, calling to political action while assuming that such action should not be undertaken with the aim of closure. This overlaps with the idea mentioned above that in the tragic journey of forgiveness in the aftermath of atrocities there is no possible closure but there is the duty to re-act without looking for closure in order for the individuals and the community to survive.

Drawing on Arendt's notion of understanding as reconciliation with the world we live in and Hegel's notion of forgiveness as reconciliation with one's destiny, as well as on Arendt's concept of collective responsibility, this work proposes to conceptualize political forgiveness, first and foremost, as a collective struggle against the tragic conundrums of political action emerging in the aftermath of major political violence. In this regard, telling the co-created story of collective responsibility appears as a way through these tragic conundrums, since it invites self-reconciliation at its limit of possibility, where it does not amount to closure.

Interlude 2

La estrella de la Memoria (o cómo el cielo se quedó sin estrellas)

Para Rafaella¹

Había una vez en el cielo una estrella.

Un día, la estrella fue a comprar luz al mercader de la luz.

“Cuánta luz deseas?” preguntó el mercader.

“Qué clases de luz tienes?” respondió la estrella.

“Tengo una luz débil y una intensa. La débil dura mucho tiempo, y aunque las personas tarden en verte desde la Tierra y por muchas lunas no sepan cómo luces, no se cansarán de buscarte en el cielo con la esperanza de que finalmente aparezcas y los illumines. Te llamarán Futuro.”

“Y la luz intensa?” preguntó la estrella.

“Esa se consume más rápidamente,” contestó el mercader. “Pero las personas podrán verte aun después de que hayas dejado de brillar, y serás como un faro para sus ojos. Te llamarán Pasado.”

“Y cuando se den cuenta de que he dejado de brillar?”

“Entonces muchos creerán que ya no existes. Ya no te buscarán, ni hablarán de tí. Te llamarán Olvido.”

“Y los que no crean eso?”

“Esos... te seguirán buscando”, dijo el mercader.

¹ Mi sobrina de cinco años me preguntó a qué me dedicaba... Y la respuesta llegó como “La estrella de la memoria.”

The Star of Memory (or how the sky was left without stars)

For Rafaella²

Once upon a time there was a star in the sky.

One day, the star went to the light merchant to buy light.

“How much light do you want?” asked the merchant.

“What kinds of light do you have?” answered the star.

“I have a weak one and an intense one. The weak one lasts a very long time, and even if people may not see you at first from the Earth and for many moons they will not know how you look, they will not tire of looking for you in the sky, hoping that you finally appear and illuminate them. They will call you Future.”

“And the intense light?” asked the star.

“That one fades more quickly,” replied the merchant. “But people will be able to see you even after you stop shining, and you will be like a lighthouse for their eyes. They will call you Past.”

“And when they realize that I have stopped shining?”

“Then many will believe that you no longer exist. They will neither look for you, nor talk about you. They will call you Oblivion.”

“And those who don’t believe that?”

“They... will keep searching for you,” answered the merchant.

² My five-year old niece asked what my work was about... And the answer came as “The Star of Memory.”

“Y si un día sintieran que es posible que no vuelvan a verme más? Que quizás realmente haya dejado de existir? Que tal vez no encontrarán ni siquiera los rastros de mi luz? Esos también me llamarán Olvido?” insistió la estrella, inquieta.

“Cuando ese día llegue...”, dijo el mercader, tras un largo suspiro, “esas personas te llorarán hasta secarse. Cuando ya no tengan lágrimas, se sentarán entorno al fuego, que les recuerda tu luz, y pasarán largas horas contándose unos a otros historias sobre tí. Aun cuando ya no brilles en el cielo, brillarás en sus historias. Te llamarán Memoria.”

Luego de reflexionar unos instantes, la estrella sentenció:

“Quiero la luz intensa.”

“Muy bien”, dijo el mercader.

Durante algún tiempo de ese que se cuenta por miles de millones de años, la estrella brilló tan intensamente que desde la Tierra era imposible no verla sin parpadear. Un día, tal como lo había vaticinado el mercader, la estrella pudo sentir cómo su luz comenzaba a enfriarse. Supo que se acercaba el final, que su brillo se apagaría igual que se apaga la vida de las personas cuyos ojos se deleitaban al contemplarla. Recordó entonces las palabras del mercader. Algunas personas la olvidarían, tan pronto como dejaran de verla. Otros, en cambio, la recordarían en sus historias, aun sabiendo que quizás mañana no encontrarían en el cielo el más mínimo rastro de su luz. Sólo le restaba desear, con sus ya mermadas fuerzas, que la Memoria de las personas fuese más poderosa que el Olvido.

“And if one day they feel that it is possible that they won’t see me again? That perhaps I really don’t exist anymore? That maybe they won’t find even a trace of my light? Will these call me Oblivion as well?” insisted the star, agitated.

“When that day comes...,” said the merchant after taking a deep breath, “those people will mourn you until their eyes are dry. Once they have no more tears, they will sit around a fire that reminds them of your light, and they will spend long hours telling one another stories about you. Even when you no longer shine in the sky, you will shine in their stories. They will call you Memory.”

After reflecting for some time, the star stated:

“I want the intense light.”

“Very good,” said the merchant.

For some time, time that is counted in thousands of millions of years, the star shone so intensely that it was impossible to see her from the Earth without blinking. One day, as the merchant had predicted, the star could feel that her light had started to cool. She knew that the end was approaching, that her brightness would fade as the lives of the people whose eyes were delighted to contemplate her. She remembered then the words of the merchant. Some people would forget her, as soon as they stopped seeing her. Others, however, would remember her in their stories, even knowing that tomorrow they would not find in the sky even the slightest trace of her light. With her lessened strength, she could only hope for the Memory of people to be stronger than Oblivion.

Un día, en que la estrella había palidecido tanto que tiritaba de frío, algo inesperado sucedió. Comenzó a devorar a las estrellas a su alrededor. Llena de ira y tristeza, la estrella decidió ir a ver al mercader.

“Hace algunos miles de millones de años tú me vendiste una luz intensa”, comenzó la estrella, encendida.

“Lo siento tanto...”, dijo el mercader, intimidado por la furia de la estrella.

“Durante millones de lunas alumbré a los seres humanos con toda mis fuerzas. Trabajé sin descanso, porque quería ser Memoria.”

“Las personas aun pueden elegir recordarte, ahora que no te ven...”

“Si, pero qué clase de recuerdo será ese, si ven que le arranco al cielo todas las otras estrellas? Las que son Futuro y las que son Pasado? Qué sucederá ahora con el recuerdo de mi luz?”

Temeroso de sus palabras, el mercader contestó: “Cada vez que las personas se sienten entorno al fuego a contarte en historias, y vean el cielo sin estrellas, abrazarán tu recuerdo, sí... Pero se culparán los unos a los otros por las estrellas que ya no se ven en el cielo, y no podrán más que llorar y llorar y llorar... Serás dolor infinito... Te llamarán Melancolía.”

One day, when the star had paled so much that she was shivering with cold, something unexpected happened. In a desperate attempt to recover light and warmth, she started to devour the stars around her. Full of rage and sadness, the star decided to go see the merchant.

“Some thousands of millions of years ago, you sold me an intense light,” the star began to say, furious.

“I am so sorry...,” said the merchant, intimidated by the star’s rage.

“For millions of moons I illuminated people with all my strength. I worked without rest, because I wanted to be Memory.”

“People can still choose to remember you, now that they don’t see you...”

“Yes, but what kind of memory will this be, if they see that I pull out all the other stars from the sky? Those who are Future and those who are Past? What will happen now to the memory of my light?”

Fearful of his words, the merchant answered: “Each time people sit around the fire to share stories about you, and they see the sky without stars, they will cherish the memory of you... But they will blame each other for the stars that they don’t see in the sky anymore, and they will only be able to weep, and weep, and weep... You became a black hole in their Memory... You will be infinite sorrow... They will call you Melancholy.”

Chapter 3

From Mujica's *apologos* to the imagined community:

Political forgiveness, collective responsibility, and re-membrance

In the Introduction, I described the “Ceremony of Forgiveness” as an example of how the topic of forgiveness appeared in a somehow spontaneous fashion in the Uruguayan public space, still fractured by the unhealed wounds of the civic-military dictatorship. With multiple questions in mind regarding this example, I explored in chapter 1 the literature on apology and outlined an approach to political apology in particular as a gesture that contributes to co-creating a collective story of responsibility, and a story of collective responsibility. I argued that political apology thus conceived may set the stage for political forgiveness, conceptualized as a struggle of the political community in the aftermath of atrocities. It is a struggle through the paradoxes between unconditionality and contingency, conceptual impossibility and practical possibility. The acknowledgment of collective responsibility was presented as a potential pivot of these paradoxes, situating political forgiveness somewhere between an inconceivable and undesirable closure and the call to act politically in order to honor the promise of togetherness on which a political community is founded.

In the following pages, I will examine the example of the “Ceremony of Forgiveness” through the lens of political forgiveness as conceptualized thus far in this work, and I will further develop the conceptualization proposed. In this sense, I start by presenting the idea that President Mujica’s choice to limit his speech to the strictly formal requirements of the legal sentence appears as a coherent and even predictable event,

considering certain aspects of Mujica's trajectory. However, I claim that such coherence came at a price. Although Mujica was very efficient in fulfilling the legal requirements of the sentence, thereby contributing to a historic achievement for Uruguayan society – the acknowledgment of the state's responsibility for the events of the lead years – he chose to fuel a binary narrative of the past and missed a historic setting for a “madness of the possible,” that is, to bridge the abyss between the possible and the impossible through the spoken word by introducing an alternative, non-binary narrative of the past. Specifically, by choosing to deliver a strictly juridical speech focused exclusively on legal responsibility, Mujica chose to not introduce a narrative of collective responsibility that challenges both the idea that past wrongdoings are the consequence of a confrontation between two actors in war and that, in the process of dealing with wrongdoings stemming from atrocious past events, there is a choice to be made between “looking back” and “looking forward.” A narrative of collective responsibility relies instead on broadening the circle of sufferers – in Mujica's case that could have meant to step out from his institutional role and speak from his personal stories – and the work of counter-remembering, that is, the re-evocation of the past suffering in the present. Counter-remembering makes way for political action in the form of a melancholic agency. Indeed, the latter struggles against the irredeemable nature of the suffering caused by loss in the aftermath of atrocities not for the sake of achieving closure, but for the sake of rekindling political action. Furthermore, the work of counter-remembering evokes a shared sense of loss that founds, paradoxically, a renewed sense of belonging, which nonetheless exists in permanent dialogue with the past. Counter-remembering becomes then a way to remember the political community. I end the chapter presenting a Uruguayan audiovisual

piece entitled “Time passes by” as an example of counter-remembering through the theatrical representation of the irrecoverable.

A. Behind the scenes of a historic act of acknowledgment

The “Ceremony” was a historic act for Uruguayan society. To date, it remains the most important symbolic act of recognition of the victims of state terrorism. The expectations it raised and its impact *a posteriori*, partially documented in the Introduction, show this. By acknowledging state responsibility in past atrocities, on behalf of the state, Mujica set a milestone in Uruguayan politics and law. Although the act was the consequence of an international juridical mandate, and was, in this regard, less deliberate than a national spontaneous act would have been, the content of the speech was broadly deliberate. Why did the Uruguayan President stick to a formal legal speech, cautiously worded, rich in technicalities to which he does not very often resort? Why did he read and follow the protocol thoroughly, while in many other occasions he has made a point of playing down formalities?¹

1. Since he was a member of the Parliament, the resort to an easily accessible, local, “popular” vocabulary, which may appear inadequate for a politician, as well as the broader questioning of the rules of protocol regarding how a politician should dress or where he should live, have been characteristics of Mujica’s profile.

1. A coherent and predictable act

According to Mauricio Rabuffetti, the author of a new book about the President,² when Mujica delivered a minimalist speech, he was consistent with the commitment he made before he was released from jail in March 1985 by the first post-dictatorial government, through the Law of Amnesty. Along with the decision to desist from armed action, the Tupamaros' leader, Raúl Sendic, Mujica, and other former members of the MLN-T, assumed the commitment not to seek political or juridical revenge. This commitment is actually made explicit in the first speech delivered by the current Uruguayan head of state after being freed, on March 1985, in the Platense Patín Club of Montevideo: "I don't believe in any form of human justice. Any form of justice, in my domestic philosophy, is a transaction with the necessity of vengeance... We will be on guard next to you, with you, and with all the People. But not with an avenging axe in our hands, not at all, we are here to try to do and build with you."³ When he was running for presidential election in 2010, Mujica reiterated in an interview with the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* that he does not believe in justice and that it "stinks of vengeance."⁴ After that interview, he clarified: "what I said there [at the interview with *La Nación*] is not new at all, I have been saying it for 25 years, otherwise take a look to the first speech I gave in the Platense [the Platense Patín Club of Montevideo]. Justice is

2. Mauricio Rabuffetti, journalist and author of the book *José Mujica. The Quiet Revolution* (2014) [*José Mujica. La revolución tranquila*], in discussion with the author, November 2014.

3. "Y habló el compañero Mujica," *Liberación Nacional*, March 1985, 22.

4. Cárpena, Ricardo. 2009. "No sé qué ideología tienen los Kirchner", *lanación.com*. September 13. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1173730-no-se-que-ideologia-tienen-los-kirchner>.

a human construction, not gods', in each time and each moment it will inevitably reflect human beings' weaknesses." Moreover, he stated that, "we fighters apply Justice when we win. Those who had the weapons in their hands applied justice to us, or what they said was justice, which was military justice, and I fear that on the other side there can be something like a sense of revenge." "This does not mean that it [justice] has no value, it is essential to coexist." In sum, "justice is to be obeyed and backed up, but it is a human institution, and those who were in a fight, cannot be judge and jury."⁵

These words reflect several aspects of Mujica's thought. Firstly, they show that in 2010 Mujica was ready to keep the promise he made before being released from jail and stand by his long-term conviction that justice regarding atrocities during the lead years would lead to vengeance. Secondly, Mujica makes it clear that his interpretation of the episodes in which he took part during the lead years is that in that time there were two enemies at war, the MLN-T and the Armed Forces. Thirdly, these words capture his belief that former *guerrilleros* such as himself are not in a position to judge fairly – that is, impartially – and therefore, should as individuals stand aside in the process of the nation to come to terms with its past.⁶

Mujica's commitment to avoid seeking or promoting revenge is connected with his perspective on how Uruguayans should deal with their past. When there was public controversy around the Interpretative Law of the LEPCS, Mujica was consulted by the

5. "Mujica: la justicia es una institución humana, esencial para la convivencia," official website of the Frente Amplio. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.frenteamplio.org.uy/node/812>.

6. As the current Ministry of Defense and former *Tupamaro* Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro recalls, Mujica believes that Uruguayan society's issues around how to deal with its past "will end when we [the actors who played main roles in the events of the lead years] are all dead." (2011. Rogelio Núñez, "Uruguay: la victoria más amarga del Frente Amplio," *Infolatam*. April 25. Accessed December 6, 2014. <http://www.infolatam.com/2011/04/24/uruguay-la-victoria-mas-amarga-del-frente-amplio/>.)

newspaper *El País* about how things would be if they were strictly up to him: “as a person, I am not addicted to living looking behind, because life is always the future and everyday the sun rises. But that is my way of being. I cannot impose it on my fellow citizens.”⁷ In these words, Mujica points at another division among Uruguayans, between looking back *or* looking forward, and sides with the latter position.

In his speech at the “Ceremony,” Mujica “did what he does best: keep the balance.”⁸ As the President of all Uruguayans, Mujica sought to avoid expressing his own opinions, lest speaking on behalf of some Uruguayans, who would have agreed with his opinions, would leave aside the voice of others, who he also represents, and who disapproved of the sentence and/or the decision of the government to abide by that sentence. This may have been particularly important, considering that it was only two years before the “Ceremony” that the majority of Uruguayan people – albeit a slim majority – chose to not put into question the LEPCS for the second time since the law was passed. In sum, Mujica deliberately decided to not take the risk of fueling the antagonisms existing among Uruguayans with regard to the recent past.⁹ In this regard,

7. Gallego Díaz, Soledad. 2011. “Yo no miro para atrás pero no puedo imponer a los ciudadanos mi manera de ser,” *El País* (Spain). April 17. Accessed December 6, 2014. http://elpais.com/diario/2011/04/17/domingo/1303012356_850215.html.

8. These are words from the interview with Mauricio Rabuffetti.

9. It is interesting to notice that, in this regard, Mujica’s behavior in the “Ceremony” is in line with his attitude when the Interpretative Law of the LEPCS was passed by the Parliament. Mujica, who disagrees with the content of the LEPCS, also disagreed with the Parliament’s decision to modify the law given that such decision makes changes to the post-dictatorship legal order that the Uruguayan people twice resolved to not make. On that occasion, Mujica expressed: “The Executive avoided being part of that discussion, because we are the presidents of the nation - of those who voted on us and those who did not vote on us. We said from the very beginning [of our government] that we wanted to build, as much as possible, national unity. [...] this discussion is not good for national unity.” (Soledad Gallego Díaz, “Yo no miro para atrás pero no puedo imponer a los ciudadanos mi manera de ser,” Gallego Díaz, Soledad. 2011. “Yo no miro para atrás pero no puedo imponer a los ciudadanos mi manera de ser,” *El País* (Spain). April 17. Accessed December 6, 2014. http://elpais.com/diario/2011/04/17/domingo/1303012356_850215.html.)

the analysis should focus not only on what was said in the “Ceremony,” but also on what Mujica chose to not say.

At the “Ceremony”, Mujica took the opportunity opened by the sentence of the Inter-American Commission to acknowledge the state’s responsibility, thereby giving a response to a long-standing demand of the families of disappeared people to be recognized as victims and receive reparation, in a legal act whose legitimacy cannot be impugned. For Mujica the “Ceremony” was not a sufficient response to that demand, but a symbolic gesture through which he could address all victims of forced disappearance and their families as represented by the Gelmans. It enabled him to tackle an issue that is of major relevance for a large part of the Uruguayan people, without exposing himself to criticisms from the opposition, who would accuse him of being a menace to democratic institutions – a position from which he eagerly sought to remove himself.¹⁰

In sum, the reason why Mujica chose to deliver a strictly legal statement where he speaks exclusively on behalf of the Uruguayan state has to do with the fact that acting otherwise and stepping into his personal stories might have lead him to break his longstanding promise to not seek or promote revenge among Uruguayans for the events of the lead years. In other words, he believes the system of justice to be imperfect enough that it may end up serving vengeful purposes, and he did not want to use this juridically legitimate occasion to fuel revenge.

10. In fact, during the electoral campaign of 2010, the opposition, and particularly, former President Julio María Sanguinetti, promoted the idea that voters should vote for Mujica’s competitor, Luis Alberto Lacalle, as the next President of the country, to give continuity to the democratic institutions, thus suggesting that a government headed by Mujica would cause the country to go back to the conflicts of the ‘60s and ‘70s.

2. A binary narrative

It seems therefore that Mujica considers that there is no other possible scenario besides that of fueling retaliation, if he steps out of a strictly institutional, legally-lead performance. In this regard, I argue that what Mujica chooses to not say in his speech, speaks to a binary narrative deeply rooted in Uruguayan society, a narrative with two components. One concerns the actors with the leading roles in the story of political violence in Uruguay in the '60s and '70s. It advances the idea that these actors are the *guerrilla* movement and the Armed Forces, confronting each other in the context of a war. Interestingly, this idea is also part of the theory of the two demons. The other component of this binary narrative concerns temporality, and places in opposition the moral duty to look to the future, interpreted by some as a call to forgive and forget, and the duty to look to the past and remember.

This binary narrative is visible in many of the declarations by Uruguayan political leaders brought up in the Introduction, with some politicians raising their voices to support it and some questioning its validity. The first aspect of the narrative, referring to the idea that there were two actors, at war with one another, which were responsible for the past wrongdoings, is made explicit in the declarations of some officials of the Armed Forces, such as those of General Manuel Fernández, who referred in 2000 to the left as “the internal enemy,” and affirmed that leftist groups “have not stopped their fight,”¹¹ or General Iván Paulós, who claimed around the same time that “war is violence and

11. Rodríguez, Pablo. “El Jefe del Ejército amenazó a la izquierda; Batlle lo destituyó. El regreso de los muertos vivos en Uruguay,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-07/pag03.htm>.

violence always falls on both sides, but it seems that here [in Uruguay] the only victims are on the side of the subversion.”¹² Another sign of how ingrained this aspect of the narrative is in Uruguayan society is the fact that former President Tabaré Vázquez’s initiative to celebrate a “Day of Never Again” was supported by some for the same reason for which others rejected it – because it was interpreted as subscribing to the theory of the two demons. Interestingly, the detractors of the theory of the two demons, such as the representative and former *Tupamaro* Esteban Pérez (“one thing is violence and another thing is the right of peoples to choose the methods for their liberation”¹³) and current Senator Rafael Michelini (“the victims of the dictatorship and the perpetrators [...] are well differentiated,”¹⁴) questioned on that occasion the theory of the two demons only partially. In fact, they questioned the equal treatment that Vázquez’ initiative gave to the actions of those who fought by *guerrilla* warfare and the actions of state terrorism by former members of the Armed Forces, but they did not question the two-sided nature of the conflict, and its conceptualization as a war.

Among those who seem to disagree with the first aspect of the binary narrative described above is the current Minister of Defense, Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, a former *Tupamaro* and one of Mujica’s closest men, who stated that perpetuating a dualistic idea of responsibility for past events is “to tell the story of the country

12. “El Presidente uruguayo respondió a dos militares. Batlle contra los dinosaurios,” *Página 12*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2000/00-04/00-04-15/pag19a.htm>.

13. Nicrosi, Loreley. 2008. “Reconciliación: el Frente le da la espalda a Vázquez,” *El País digital*. June 15. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/08/06/15/pnacio_352181.asp.

14. Nicrosi, Loreley. 2008. “Reconciliación: el Frente le da la espalda a Vázquez,” *El País digital*. June 15. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/08/06/15/pnacio_352181.asp.

wrongly,”¹⁵ and said that if he were to sit around a table to request forgiveness, that should be a table with more than two seats for the Armed Forces and the former *Tupamaros*. Likewise, former President Jorge Batlle seemed to question the same aspect of this binary narrative when he expressed in his inaugural speech in 2000 that the state should assume responsibility on behalf of the society because “we all have responsibilities in what happened,” and when he pointed out that “we have gone through so many things, we have suffered so many things, and none of us can say that someone is guilty or that someone is innocent, and thus this [Uruguay as it is today] is not the result of a Manichaeian world of evil against good.”¹⁶

The second, temporal aspect of the narrative, which posits an opposition between the attitude of looking “behind” or looking “forward,” is captured in the contrast between the Archbishop Cotugno’s advice to “decisively close the wounds of the past” and move beyond “the effects of the time when we were devastated by intolerance and terrorism in its multiple sorts”¹⁷ on the one hand, and former President Vázquez’ intention to “look for a path of encounter without forgetting the past, without suggesting an end point,”¹⁸ on the other hand. In other words, this second element of a binary narrative of the past speaks of the divergences among Uruguayan political actors regarding closure.

15. Fernández, Hugo. 2012. “El perdón de Fernández Huidobro,” *El Diario*, March 29. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://eldiario.com.uy/2012/03/29/el-perdon-de-fernandez-huidobro/>.

16. “Texto de la alocución de Jorge Batlle ante la Asamblea General del Poder Legislativo,” *Espectador.com*. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.espectador.com/text/documentos/doc03012.htm>.

17. 2006. “Cotugno pide que familiares de víctimas concedan el ‘perdón’,” *El País digital*. December 23. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://historico.elpais.com.uy/06/12/23/pnacio_254977.asp.

18. 2008. “Tabaré Vázquez de gira. Ni olvido ni perdón,” *Montevideo Portal*. June 16. Accessed December 5, 2014. http://www.montevideo.com.uy/notnoticias_63830_1.html.

Both aspects of this narrative are visible in Mujica's declarations and in his choice to assume a strictly institutional role at the "Ceremony." Although Mujica declared in 2000 that he was ready to request forgiveness if all actors involved in the events of the lead years were too, the first component of the binary narrative, according to which in Uruguay's past conflict there were two sides, those who won and those who lost in the confrontation, is particularly visible in his idea that justice is delivered by winners and applied to losers. This perspective on the past is at odds with Mujica's position as the representative of the Uruguayan state, one of whose institutional foundations is the legal system. In this regard, at the "Ceremony" Mujica seems to find a balance between the personal disbelief in justice as potentially vengeful, and the institutional need to support the state's actions in the decision to deliver a strictly juridical speech, in which he explicitly expresses that the state "affirms its commitment to justice."¹⁹

Regarding the second component of the binary narrative, on the one hand, Mujica expresses in his strictly juridical speech that the Uruguayan state acknowledges its responsibility in human rights violations "independently from the material and *temporal* range in which facts took place,"²⁰ thereby subscribing to the idea that the state's legal responsibility is still a pending issue for the Uruguay society, one that must be addressed even if that requires to turn the collective attention to the past. On the other hand, when it comes to how Uruguayans collectively deal with their past, Mujica seems to endorse a

19. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, "Palabras del Presidente Mujica en acto público del 21 de marzo," official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 21. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/Comunicacion/comunicacionNoticias/discurso-mujica-21-de-marzo>.

20. 2012. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, "Palabras del Presidente Mujica en acto público del 21 de marzo," official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 21. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/Comunicacion/comunicacionNoticias/discurso-mujica-21-de-marzo>. The emphasis is mine.

binary narrative of past, since he suggests that it may not be desirable for a society to “look behind.” In his particular case this is certainly not tantamount to a call to forget – otherwise why would he have hosted an act where he acknowledged the past wrongdoings carried out by the state? – nor is it a call to personally forgive, as if Jankélévitch’s (2005) “temporal decay” (13) had caused the gravity of the fault to be eroded by time. Furthermore, as mentioned in the Introduction, for Mujica forgiveness is and is to remain a matter of each person, and therefore we should not make a public call to victims to forgive their perpetrators. Instead of a call to forget or to personally forgive, Mujica’s idea that looking “behind” is socially undesirable speaks of his dualistic approach to temporality where a focus on the past appears as potentially undermining our ability to work towards the future. Another way in which Mujica endorses a narrative where past and present struggle against one another, is by positing that as a fighter who was on the side of those who lost the confrontation forty years ago, there are actions that he cannot carry out in his present as the President, thus implying that the present is still intertwined with the past antagonism between the Armed Forces and the *guerrilla* movement, and that this antagonism demarcates the present scope of action.

B. A historic setting for the madness of the possible... and a broken promise

My real territory was imagination, fantasy, regulated madness to the extent of the possible. So – you understand, right? – these events, if they were such, these facts or mostly these anecdotes were at the frontier between what was real and what was not.

Until the Word arrived.

Mauricio Rosencof 2010, 138

The Letters that Never Came

1. A note on legal and collective responsibility

The Arendtian concept of collective responsibility, which I started to examine in the previous chapters, challenges the juridical idea of responsibility. As explained in chapter 2, collective responsibility stems from an arbitrary condition – the belonging to a community of the responsible party – by contradistinction to legal responsibility or guilt (either moral or legal), which derives from people's actual actions. In this regard, while legal responsibility necessarily applies to a juridical person, either an individual or a collective entity, such as a corporation, collective responsibility involves the entire political community. From this perspective, collective responsibility cancels impartiality, which is the cornerstone of the Western justice system: since the responsible party is the entire community, among those who belong to it no one is in a position to assess the others' responsibility impartially. All members of the community are judges and members of the jury at the same time. Archbishop Tutu (1999) points to this with regard to the South African transition from Apartheid to a democratic regime, as compared with

the Nuremberg trials, where the Allies judged some of Nazi Germany's prominent figures. "While the Allies could pack up and go home after Nuremberg, we in South Africa had to live with one another" (21).

Moreover, there is no way in which the whole community as such can be held judicially liable, that is, made accountable before the legal system for past wrongdoings. Unlike legal responsibility, collective responsibility cannot be judicially enforced: no one would be entitled to enforce it, since everyone bears responsibility. Even if the international juridical system may hold the state legally liable for past atrocities, since the state is a juridical person who represents the political community, it cannot enforce collective responsibility on the political community. Acknowledging and assuming collective responsibility is a task that can only be carried out by the political community itself. In this regard, it is an eminently political task. Because it involves the voicing of a collective claim, heads of state are in a privileged position to perform that task, legitimately speaking on behalf of the entire political community.

There are multiple reasons to question the extent to which the legal system can satisfactorily address atrocious events of political violence, such as the physical absence of some of those who would bear major legal responsibility; their unwillingness to collaborate with the legal investigations about the factual truth;²¹ or even the inability to equate the severity of the crime with the severity of the punishment, in Hegel's terms, or the "inexpiability" of the crime, as Jankélévitch would express it. These are not reasons

21. The topic of truth, which is beyond the scope of this work, is certainly a major issue in *post*-political violence scenarios. Factual truth refers to what Todorov (2010) describes as "a scientifically or legally confirmed truth based on collecting material evidence," by counterdistinction to a truth "that resides in an agreement between the two parties [the victim and the offender]" (57). Leaving aside the two-party approach to political apology or forgiveness, which is questioned here, the idea that there are different "layers" of truth and that one of them rests on a consensus among political actors that major wrongdoings were carried out (Daye 2004), highlights the relevance of a political approach to responsibility in these contexts.

to not pursue justice or to downplay its importance for togetherness in a political community in the aftermath of political violence, but to shed light on why the assignment and acknowledgment of legal responsibility, as necessary as it is, may not be sufficient for reestablishing that togetherness. In other words, this does not mean that the acknowledgment of collective responsibility replaces the recognition of legal responsibility, or that it is more relevant than the latter, or that both types of responsibility are mutually exclusive. In fact, in the Uruguayan example the historic act of recognition of the state's legal responsibility for past wrongdoings ended up being a historic setting for introducing an alternative non-binary narrative about the past, a narrative of collective responsibility.

2. Imagination and the [spoken] Word

As pointed out in the Introduction, until the “Ceremony,” there was neither a precedent of a Uruguayan president verbally acknowledging the state's responsibility in the wrongdoings committed in the '60s and '70s, nor publicly referring to forgiveness with regard to those wrongdoings while still in office. This, despite the fact that the Uruguayan public space has been pervaded for a long time by heated controversies around these issues, in which former presidents became actively involved once they were out of office. As suggested in Tavuchis' (1991) work *On Apology*, a satisfactory apology necessarily involves the spoken word, because the written word does not fulfill the same social need as the verbal gesture. By itself, the written word does not provide full recognition to the victims as such.

The approach to apology as a co-created story or set of stories told in public revolves around the verbal exchanges among the actors. Although the Uruguayan state acknowledged responsibility for past atrocities in writing in the law of reparations No. 18.596 of September 18, 2009, Mujica has so far been the only head of state to engage, in that capacity, in a *spoken recognition* of the state's responsibility for actions of state terrorism, as well as a public reference to the issue of forgiveness for the atrocities committed during the lead years.

Interestingly, he did not do so in a totally spontaneous fashion. Both the spoken recognition of the state's responsibility and the public reference to the issue of forgiveness came as consequences of Mujica's deliberate decision to fulfill an international juridical mandate. He notoriously emphasized, time and again – before, during, and after the public speech – that the aim of the “Ceremony” was to fulfill Uruguay's juridical obligations within the international community. As pointed out by Tavuchis (1991), an apologetic speech whose main goal is to fulfill legal obligations is flawed because it is being delivered as a mere means to reinforce the apologizer's authority. Similarly, the blind decision of forgiveness is an unconditional event alien to any instrumental, economic logic of exchange, such as the judicial logic, which aims at passing judgment, thereby reaching the closure of a conflict. The fact that the first time in Uruguay's post-dictatorial history in which the President verbally addresses the victims of state terrorism and referred publicly to the issue of forgiveness, was undertaken with cautious recourse to a strictly legal language, calls for an examination of the role of the spoken word in political apology and forgiveness.

According to Benjamin (1996), “language is in every case not only communication of the communicable but also, at the same time, a symbol of the non-communicable” (74). Language appears therefore as universal and singular at the same time. Also, from Benjamin’s perspective it is only through the *spoken* word that the non-communicable core of certain words can be redeemed – it is by resorting to the universal that the singular can be expressed:

The words that are a ‘riddle’ from the outset contain a symbolic core, beyond the meaning communicated in it, a core that is the symbol of non-communicability. For this reason many riddles can be solved simply through an image, but they can be redeemed only through the word. (Doxtader 2007, 119, quoting Benjamin)

In this citation Benjamin differentiates “the word” from “the image,” which can be interpreted as indicating that by saying “the word” he is actually referring to the spoken word, since the written word remains a silent image until it is pronounced. The spoken word is thus presented as the “real” word. Benjamin points to the potential of our imagination to grasp the symbolic core of certain words, and, at the same time, the limitations of our imagination to redeem this non-communicability and the necessity to resort to the real word both to acknowledge and struggle against this non-communicability. In this regard, Benjamin’s thoughts suggest an interesting approach to the role of the spoken word in political forgiveness, since they provide the conceptual basis to posit the insurmountable non-communicability of the harm caused by major atrocities – as Arendt argues in *Men in Dark Times* (2010), major wrongdoings can be acknowledged but not mastered. Moreover, Benjamin’s perspective points to the relevance of the imagination to grasp the non-communicable core of the words through which we refer to a wrongdoing, and the ability of the spoken word – the same that

cannot fully communicate the dimension of that wrongdoing – to express that non-communicability.

3. The *apologos* of a tragic hero: tragic recognition and self-reconciliation

a. Broadening the circle of sufferers

In her essay “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” Arendt (1994) points to the faculty of imagination as essential for the work of understanding – which would consist of grasping, for instance, the non-communicable core of words: “imagination is concerned with the particular darkness of the human heart and the peculiar density which surrounds everything that is real.” Furthermore, “true understanding [...] trusts that imagination eventually will catch at least a glimpse of the always frightening light of truth” (Arendt 1994a, 322). “Without this kind of imagination,” says Arendt, “which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world” (323). Particularly, Arendt presents tragic recognition, resting on imagination, as a dimension of the work of understanding.

The Arendtian tragic recognition, which was linked in the previous chapter with storytelling, could be defined as “a process whereby the human agent, who has stopped acting, becomes a listener or spectator of stories and experiences, *in imagination*, the suffering entailed by his past misdeeds” (Pirro, quoted in Klusmeyer 2009, 336). Two elements stem from this conceptualization of tragic recognition. Firstly, it is triggered by an individual – the tragic hero – but may involve all the members of the community as listeners of the story that is being told. Secondly, it implies the experience of unfinished

suffering. Through imagination, the listeners experience in the present a suffering with regard to past actions, by recognizing themselves in the tragic hero, making their past suffering contemporary. These two elements of tragic recognition, which we will refer to as broadening the circle of sufferers and counter-remembering, respectively, posit an alternative to the two aspects of the binary narrative endorsed by Mujica.

The act mandated by the Court became the first time since redemocratization in which the Uruguayan political community met in the public space to address the outstanding issues of the lead years. According to the section on reparations from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights sentence in the case of María Claudia García de Gelman, “the [Uruguayan] State must, within a period of one year, carry out a public act of acknowledgment of international responsibility for the facts of the present case.”²² A public act necessarily means a three-party spoken exchange in the public space, involving the Uruguayan state embodied by the President; the Gelman family; and the audience. Mujica and the Gelman family were among the main actors of the political context in which the wrongdoings addressed in that speech took place. In this regard, the “Ceremony” provided an exceptional setting for a co-creative political apology, as compared with the setting in which most official apologies occur, where all or most of the individual actors involved in past wrongdoings are either deceased or are unwilling to take part. Moreover, among the audience, there were many others who played important roles in the past events related to the “Ceremony,” such as the representatives of the Armed Forces, former presidents, and senators and representatives. Particularly, the

22. Inter-American Court of Human Rights, “Case Gelman v. Uruguay, Judgment of February 24, 2011 (Merits and Reparations),” official website of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Accessed on December 7, 2014.
http://www.corteidh.or.cr/cf/Jurisprudencia2/busqueda_casos_contenciosos.cfm?lang=en.

“Ceremony” was a unique event, both in Uruguayan history and as compared with other events around the world where heads of state delivered apologetic speeches by proxy, in that, as the President, Mujica had a unique triple status. He was at the same time the institutional representative of a state that perpetrated criminal acts against its people, and as an individual, he is both a victim of this perpetrator and a former member of a *guerrilla* organization which carried out criminal acts itself during the lead years. In this regard, Mujica’s position in the “Ceremony” can be seen as that of a tragic hero, trapped in the formal obligation to apologize on behalf of a state apparatus of which he was a victim, and against which he once fought.

Contrary to most political apologies, which are exclusively delivered by proxy, Mujica had in the “Ceremony” the opportunity to issue an exceptional political apology by fulfilling his institutional role and stepping out of it to step into his individual roles. He had the chance to speak to a public audience on behalf of the Uruguayan people *and* as an individual, with his share of suffering as a victim and responsibility for his misdeeds – without necessarily entering the field of personal forgiveness or remorse, but without necessarily avoiding it either. Putting in the public space the different stories in which he took and takes part, speaking from his multiple roles, would have been a recognition of the multiple past and present roles of all those who were potentially listening to his speech. Mujica’s reference to the experience of tragedy at a personal level,²³ far from downplaying the institutional aspect of the apologetic statement, could

23. In this regard, there was a commentary in the *Edmonton Journal* by Allan Chambers (1994), who brought the story of a meeting between a U.S. Admiral who ordered the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam in 1968 and a General of the Vietnamese People’s Army who conceived the Tet Offensive against South Vietnam. The Admiral’s son, who fought in Vietnam, died of cancer, and his grandson has learning disabilities. He believes both were caused by the Agent Orange. In this regard, Chambers suggests: “the Ancient Greeks conceived of tragedy in personal terms, saw it through the eyes and feelings and consciences of individuals. The chief characteristic of the 20th Century, by contrast, lies in the large-scale

have made it more meaningful, more dense, by shedding light not only on institutional or individual responsibility, but on both, thereby multiplying the meaning of the institutional gesture by the meaning of the individual one.

Because of Mujica's multiple statuses and because among the attendants of the "Ceremony" there were many who lived through the lead years, the "Ceremony" was an unprecedented and promising stage to question a binary narrative about the responsibility for past events in its two aspects. Regarding the actors who bear that responsibility, as a tragic hero who addresses the entire community, Mujica could have broadened the circle of sufferers, inviting the listeners to engage in weaving a co-created and thickening tapestry of stories of responsibility. Broadening the circle of sufferers means to broaden the circle of those invited to the conversation about the past. Since the Arendtian notion of collective responsibility bases historical obligation on the arbitrary fact of belonging to a political community, thus linking the temporal scope of responsibility to its spatial scope, broadening the circle of sufferers implies including in the conversation about the past not only those who lived at the time when painful events took place, but also the subsequent generations, who also have their own stories of responsibility to tell. A narrative of collective responsibility entails therefore the idea that responsibility for past events is broader than that which can be assigned to two actors, and that responsibility for the scars resulting from those events is broader, as well, than that which can be assumed by those who lived the violent episodes. It is thus a responsibility to be inter-

tragedies committed by institutions – in which individuals if they choose, are able to evade responsibility. [...] And yet a former U.S. Admiral makes a journey to Vietnam as an act of responsibility and perhaps atonement for a dead son and many other victims of a decision he once made. [A]n old commander accepts his [responsibility] and is greeted by an old adversary who, God knows, has many deaths on his conscience. In the end, it is the actions of individuals that count, and conscience is an individual thing" (Chambers, Allan. 1994. "Conscience takes a bow," *Edmonton Journal*. September 16).

generationally assumed. Regarding the temporal aspect of the binary narrative described above, according to which the collective remembering of the lead years keeps us in the past and may ultimately threaten the focus on present issues, the “Ceremony” was an opportunity for remembering collective suffering for past events as unfinished in the present. It was an occasion for counter-remembering the unhealed wounds of the past.

b. Counter-remembering and self-reconciliation

In her analysis of Benjamin’s work, Brown (2001) quotes the following conceptualization of his notion of mindfulness:

mindfulness means remembrance stretched by forgetting; here, forgetting should be understood not as not remembering, but as a counter-remembering. In mindfulness, what has been experienced is not pinned down but opened up to its pre- and post-history. But this also means that through mindfulness past suffering is experienced as something unfinished. (Brown 2001, 171, quoting Bolz and van Reijen)

According to this approach, mindfulness relies on counter-remembering, and counter-remembering is remembering that struggles against the localization of the suffering for past events in the past. Since counter-remembering resists the narrowing of suffering’s temporality to the past, it implies that this suffering is one that is to remain unfinished, therefore challenging closure.

Suffering that is not yet finished is not only suffering that must still be endured but also suffering that can still be redeemed; it might develop another face through contemporary practices. Making a historical event or formation contemporary, making it ‘an outrage to the present’ and thus exploding or reworking both the way in which it has been remembered and the way in which it is positioned in historical consciousness as ‘past’, is precisely the opposite of bringing that phenomena to ‘closure’ . . . (Brown 200, 171)

Counter-remembering, that is, approaching suffering for past events as unfinished, can be seen as a means for self-reconciliation without closure – that is, an opened, non-definitive, precarious self-reconciliation in two ways. In a Hegelian sense, self-reconciliation with one’s own destiny implies a coming to terms with oneself for the actions that “could not have been avoided, neither could they be erased nor repaired” (Acosta López 2012, 58). In Mujica’s case, as a tragic hero who struggles with his fate, the “Ceremony” was an opportunity to acknowledge and come to terms with the unavoidable character of his conflicting position as the representative and spokesman of his own perpetrator, the ineffaceable nature of his actions as a *guerrillero*, and the irreparable character of his suffering as a victim. In an Arendtian sense, counter-remembering involves an unending struggle to make ourselves contemporaries with the events of the world we live in, in order to counteract the feeling of being a stranger and make ourselves “at home in this world.” In this regard, imagination, which according to Arendt is essential for tragic recognition, and more broadly, for understanding, plays a major role in counter-remembering. In fact, as suggested by the conceptualization of tragic recognition above, the listeners’ identification with the tragic hero through his struggle with his fate calls upon their imagination to recognize their suffering for past misdeeds in the present suffering of that tragic hero, thus re-localizing those past events into the present and relating to their own suffering as unfinished. As an exceptional setting for tragic recognition through Mujica’s acknowledgment of his diverse roles with regard to the events of the lead years, the “Ceremony” was an opportunity for challenging a binary narrative of the past not only by broadening the circle of sufferers, but also, by exercising counter-remembering, and with it, self-reconciliation that does not aim at

closure, in the ways described above. Through tragic recognition, not only is the circle of listeners invited into the conversation about the past broadened, but those listeners are also invited to connect with their unhealed wounds.

The “Ceremony” provided then a historic setting for introducing a narrative of collective responsibility that appears as an alternative to a binary narrative both because it defies a two-sided version of the past and because it invites the listeners to recognize themselves as tragic heroes as well, tragic heroes who struggle against their fate and thus resist to be doomed by their past choices. Interestingly, then, the same struggles between two forces over which tragic recognition is founded – between a protagonist and an antagonist, and between the tragic hero and his inexorable destiny – are those that enable a non-binary narrative of collective responsibility as a way out from the endless confrontation between those forces. The “Ceremony” was thus an opportunity for Mujica to move beyond a tragic binary narrative through tragedy itself. Paradoxically, the tragic impossibility of overcoming a historical fight between two forces, which is what the “Ceremony” symbolizes, created the possibility of introducing in the public space an alternative narrative of collective responsibility, which challenges the story of responsibility underlying that historical fight. The very fact that it occurred as a consequence of an international juridical mandate shows the depth of this tragic impossibility.

As promising as the setting of the “Ceremony” was in that regard, Mujica falls into tragedy by the same means through which he seeks to escape it, when he ends up fueling a binary narrative of the past and thus not being impartial, by the same

mechanism through which he intended to avoid partiality: by restricting himself to be the institutional representative of all Uruguayans.

On the one hand, when he accepts the responsibility to conduct the “Ceremony” he seems to accept his role as a tragic hero, in a gesture that shows the desire to come to terms with his own fate. In fact, Mujica does not avoid the occasion in which he knows that he will be acknowledging major wrongdoings on behalf of his perpetrator. He also makes clear in his statement that he does not intend the acknowledgment of juridical and ethical responsibility on behalf of the state to close the conflict: “the state has taken and will keep taking firm steps in order to repair the harm done.”²⁴ This is a gesture of self-reconciliation with the present impact of past events underlined by the idea that there is unfinished suffering. From this perspective, Mujica’s speech contributes to counter-remembering.

On the other hand, from the moment he decides to read his speech with no reference to the fact that he is not simply a President, but one who suffered state terrorism in his own flesh and fought against that state, Mujica denies the tragic side of the situation in which he is precisely, tragically trapped. In fact, Mujica’s speech at the “Ceremony” speaks to his reason for believing that a course of action to which he committed a long time ago still makes sense, that is, for staying on the sidelines of the realm of action and responsibility: because of the role he played in the past, it was not his place as the President to act in the present in order to address the wounds of the lead years. He is determined by his past, trapped in his fate. It is the *apologos* of a tragic

24. 2012. Presidencia República Oriental del Uruguay, “Palabras del Presidente Mujica en acto público del 21 de marzo,” official website of the Uruguayan Presidency. March 21. Accessed December 5, 2014. <http://www.presidencia.gub.uy/Comunicacion/comunicacionNoticias/discurso-mujica-21-de-marzo>.

political paralysis, a missed opportunity for overcoming tragedy by acknowledging it. In this regard, the Ceremony shows perhaps the edge between Mujica's possibility and impossibility, his own limit, the somehow impossible possibilities of action for him. Following Derrida, the "Ceremony" was Mujica's *aporia* of responsibility, the set of tragic contradictions and impossible choices through which he made a choice – a task in which, as an ethical agent, he was irreplaceable, and the more he tried to bypass it, the more he fell into it. Derrida's *aporia* puts Mujica's resolution regarding the content of his statement against the backdrop of the insoluble, shedding light on the inescapable tragedy of responsibility, which nonetheless needs to be escaped. Perhaps, the "Ceremony" could have been the opportunity to strive for a way out of tragedy, through tragedy itself.

4. The Word: political forgiveness and the madness of the possible

We started this section by reflecting on the impossibility of the spoken word to fully communicate the dimension of a wrongdoing, the role of the imagination to grasp the non-communicable core of the words through which we refer to that wrongdoing, and the potential of the spoken word to convey that non-communicability. This means that only through the spoken word is it possible to transmit that there are no words to address certain wrongdoings, to acknowledge what cannot be mastered. The spoken word appears therefore as a privileged means to struggle against non-communicability.

Furthermore, the spoken word appears as the articulation between the impossible and the possible. The impossible refers here to the imagined, conceptual impossibility of fully communicating the dimension of the suffering caused by atrocities – even more so

because it is an unfinished suffering – as well as the impossibility to fully assuming the responsibility for its harmful consequences. The possible refers to the real, practical possibility of redemption, in Benjamin’s terms, or the practical possibility of political apology and forgiveness, in our terms. Thompson (2010) points to this in her conceptualization of apology.

There is a sense in which by apologizing agents are making an effort to fulfill a responsibility that cannot be discharged in a way that truly answers to the occasion or the wrong. Nothing they can conceivably do will change this, but yet it affects our perception of what they are doing. (263)

According to Thompson, then, the agent who apologizes does so even though he knows that his responsibility is of such dimension that it cannot be satisfactorily acknowledged or assumed through an apology, and it is the action of apologizing accompanied by the awareness about the impossibility of its total accomplishment that makes the apology meaningful.

Building upon this, the spoken word is key to acknowledging the conceptual impossibility of political apology and political forgiveness, and this acknowledgment is in turn crucial for its practical possibility. In this respect we might join Arendt’s (2006) approach to the human existence as an endless sequence of beginnings initiated by words and as “a chain of miracles,” wherein the “infinite improbability” “constitutes the very texture of everything we call real,” (168) and Rosencof’s story (Interlude 1), where the author is confined to “regulated madness to the extent of the possible” “until the word arrived.” The word is the origin of a miracle, that which opens the door to the *madness of the possible*, where the realm of possibility is not an obstacle for madness, something which restricts its scope, but the foundation of a politically fecund madness. As the articulation between the imaginary, the infinitely improbable, and the real, Rosencof’s

story, and potentially the “Ceremony,” put into question the dichotomy between the realm of possibility and the realm of madness. In the conceptualization of political forgiveness proposed, the dichotomy between the impossible and the possible can mutate through the spoken word into a different scheme in which struggling against the conceptual impossibility of political forgiveness becomes the condition of its practical possibility. Rosencof’s madness after and through the Word is not a madness of the impossible, but a madness of the possible, which grasps and moves beyond the tragedy of the insoluble and the undecidable, through it. This madness of the possible exists at a limit between the possible and the impossible. Recalling Jankélévitch’s approach to the instant as an edge between contradictories, where “each contradictory is at the point of and even in the middle of becoming its contradictory,” the spoken word amounts to an instantaneous event, which founds political forgiveness.

By bringing the spoken word into the question of responsibility and forgiveness in the public space while still in office, at the “Ceremony” Mujica set the stage for addressing the gap between the conceptually impossible and the practically possible, through a public recognition of the paradoxes that the social process of forgiveness involves.

Beyond his personal trajectory, as the major institutional representative of the Uruguayan people, and facing an international juridical mandate to acknowledge legal responsibility, Mujica was already in a privileged position to publicly and verbally voice collective responsibility on behalf of the entire political community. But because of Mujica’s personal trajectory, with his share of individual suffering and responsibility, the “Ceremony” became a *historic* occasion for the acknowledgment of collective

responsibility. Not only did the “Ceremony” set the stage for the tragic hero to declare his *aporia* of responsibility and struggle against this tragic tension by acknowledging collective responsibility for the events of the lead years, it was also a timely setting to address the multiple stories of those who were listening to the speech, and thus for tragic recognition. In this regard, this event provided the opportunity for broadening the circle of sufferers and counter-remembering, enabling self-reconciliation with our destiny as tragic heroes and with the fact that these atrocities were possible in our world, without attempting to bring closure to the conflict – only caressing our scars.²⁵ The “Ceremony” was, in sum, an exceptional circumstance for challenging a tragic binary narrative of the past through an alternative narrative of collective responsibility that unblocks political action. It was a historic opportunity for the madness of the possible, for the infinite improbability to make way for the miracle, for the apparent impossibility of forgiveness to actually make room for a collective process through which political forgiveness overcomes its conceptual paradoxes and unfolds in the political realm of possibility.

Although Mujica stuck to a strictly legal language in order to keep his promise of avoiding awaking antagonisms among Uruguayans regarding the past, the fact that he did so, and therefore did not step out of his institutional role to step into a personal one from which he could have multiplied the stories of responsibility, leads him to reinforce a binary narrative about the past built on a confrontation between two antagonistic forces, eventually breaking his promise. The next section will delve into the idea that political

25. This expression refers to the words of Eleuterio Fernández Huidobro, with regard to the events of the lead years – particularly, to forced disappearance. “We have a tragedy as people that has dragged on for many years,” because of “a confrontation that was badly finished, badly solved... We have not known how to finish a war. A very tough internal confrontation, with very serious wounds in the soul of the people. (...) I believe these scars do not ever close, but there are ways to, at least, start to caress them.” Available at <http://www.infolatam.com/2011/04/24/uruguay-la-victoria-mas-amarga-del-frente-amplio/>

forgiveness, through the narrative of collective responsibility at its core, may re-member the political community in the aftermath of calamities. Particularly, the following section elaborates on how the work of counter-remembering may provide the basis for renewing the collective promise of togetherness, by contributing to a version of political engagement where a shared sense of loss is the foundation for a shared sense of belonging.

C. “Too horrible to remember, too horrible to forget”: counter-remembering sorrow, re-membering the community²⁶

1. Loss and melancholic agency

As follows from the previous section, political forgiveness rests on a non-binary narrative of collective responsibility, which calls for a collective political response to the consequences of past wrongdoings, without aiming at closure. Advancing such a narrative amounts firstly to broadening the circle of sufferers, by extending responsibility and thus the call to political action to the entire community. Secondly, a narrative of collective responsibility is nourished by the work of counter-remembering, that is, the re-evocation of suffering for past events. By counter-remembering, we acknowledge the non-communicable nature of the suffering that follows past wrongdoings of overwhelming dimensions. Moreover, broadening the circle of sufferers contributes to

26. “Too horrible to remember, too horrible to forget” are Donald Shriver’s words, quoted in Minow 1998, 17. I refer to these words later in this section.

counter-remembering. By extending the responsibility to multiple actors, past suffering is experienced as ongoing and constantly resignified. Particularly, the grief for past events does not vanish as those who lived in the time of these events die: it passes on to the new generations through the stories that nourish collective memory. In this regard, I argue that, not only is political forgiveness at odds with forgetfulness; it requires remembrance, and particularly, counter-remembering.

Suffering for past atrocities is and will remain unfinished because it is the consequence of an irreparable wrongdoing, and is thus a wound that will not completely heal despite the attempts to morally and materially compensate for the offense. According to Borradori (2011), forgiveness provides a narrative to help sufferers live with the irreparable. In her words, “forgiveness emerges as an interminable story: the story that a victim of an irreparable offense has to keep telling herself in order to survive.” It consists of “the process of revision of a story that cannot be fully told or even comprehended.” (80) From this perspective, the story of forgiveness is to remain as unfinished as the suffering that motivates it. Moreover, it is a story which cannot exist except as partially unsaid and incomprehensible, and thus as a non-communicable and irrecoverable story. As the corollary of an unspeakable harm, the story of forgiveness is and remains impossible to tell, singular. Butler (2003) refers to this as “the loss of loss itself” – the absolute loss:

Somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it; a fractured horizon looms in which to make one’s way as a spectral agency, one for whom a full “recovery” is impossible, one for whom the irrecoverable becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency. (467)

The “loss of loss itself” is then the loss augmented by our inability to tell the story about it, that is, to remember it. According to Butler, Benjamin suggests that narratives may function as a way to contain loss, and therefore the lack of narratives about the past aggravates the loss.²⁷ The loss of the stories about loss affects therefore both the individual self and the community. Yet the lack of collective narratives about loss is presented by Butler as a potential foundation for a renewed political engagement.

Linking Butler’s and Borradori’s approaches, the irrecoverable loss of the story of loss enables the singular story of forgiveness – a story that, as Derrida and Jankélévitch point out, comes up at the limit, when there is nothing else left to do in the aftermath of major wrongdoings. The unfinished and non-communicable suffering engendered by those wrongdoings is the core of a story of forgiveness, which cannot be fully told. A narrative of collective responsibility that counter-remembers this suffering is the closest approximation to that necessarily incomplete story. Although the suffering caused by calamities remains unending and unspeakable, acknowledging and assuming collective responsibility is the closest we can come to capturing and honoring the dimension of those calamities, which is beyond what can be legally expressed and engenders a responsibility that cannot be fully discharged by being judicially assumed.

By accepting the loss of a “redemptive narrative,” in Benjamin’s terms, or a narrative “of eschatological closure,” in Butler’s interpretation of Benjamin, counter-remembering questions the sequence between past, present, and future. It provides an alternative to a narrative of closure and sequential temporality that confines past suffering to the past, by positing the simultaneity of the event and the story that tells it. History no

27. In the same vein, Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, affirms that the self “is the sum of everything we remember... A nation which loses its awareness of the past gradually loses itself” (quoted in Tavuchis 1991, 131).

longer amounts to a succession of events; it becomes the setting for the event, a space where sequence, and thus eschatology are suspended. In this regard, counter-remembering founds a melancholic agency which propels a movement forward by striving for an end to suffering, knowing that such an end is impossible even to conceive of, as are the actions that caused it.

Butler's notion of melancholic agency builds upon Benjamin's conceptualization of mourning and melancholy. Butler (2003) argues that, according to Benjamin's approach, melancholy is not "the failure of mourning" or "its disavowal" (471), as seen from a Freudian perspective. It is not, therefore, the pathological state of motionlessness due to the negation of the loss, expressed through a never-ending attachment to the object that was lost and to the suffering caused by that loss.²⁸ On the one hand, Benjamin's approach to mourning and melancholy partially overlaps with Freud's in that melancholy does not resolve loss. On the other hand, in Butler's interpretation of Benjamin, the latter takes distance from a strict differentiation between mourning and melancholy: more than a deformation of mourning, melancholy is a specific form of it, a specific way to register loss. In this regard, mourning and melancholy are not completely separated processes. Mourning does not lead to the redemption of loss, nor does melancholy amount to a paralyzing, non-redemptive attachment to the object of loss. In Butler's (2003) words, "in a phenomenological sense, mourning is part of any epistemological act that 'intends' or 'anticipates' the fullness of an object, because that 'end' cannot be reached, and that

28. As Brown (2003) points out, from a Freudian perspective: "The irony of melancholia, of course, is that attachment to the object of one's sorrowful loss supersedes any desire to recover from this loss, to live free of it in the present, to be unburdened by it. This is what renders melancholia a persistent condition, a state, indeed, a structure of desire, rather than a transient response to death or loss" (459).

fullness is elusive” (471).²⁹ Mourning expresses, therefore, the loss of the hope that a fullness of any sort can be reached: for instance, with regards to past atrocities, it expresses the withdrawal from the idea that sorrow could or will have an end, and thus the loss of a redemptive narrative of closure. As a form of mourning, melancholy mourns that loss, but nonetheless struggles against it, challenges the unknowable and the irredeemable, not in order to reach closure, but in order to fight stillness. Moreover, according to Benjamin, theorizing mourning requires a melancholic perspective on the world, one that can combine the renunciation of recovering what was lost with the non-renunciation of action in that world. In this regard, melancholy can be the foundation of political engagement, and amounts to a “productive *pathos*,” in Butler’s (2003) terms, one that gives way to a political agency which does not rely on “a rewriting of the past or a redemption that would successfully reconstitute its meaning from and as the present” (468). By counter-remembering, melancholy establishes the simultaneity of the loss, the pursuit of its redemption, and the impossibility of completing such a task.

Particularly, melancholic agency rests on “a common sense of loss,” which paradoxically re-members the community by building upon a wrecked sense of belonging. In Butler’s words, “loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community cannot overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community” (Butler 2003, 468). Interestingly, Hirsch (2012) interprets Butler’s concept of melancholy as potentially redeeming loss, precisely by laying the foundation for re-constituting togetherness. In his reading of Butler, Hirsch seems to overlook the fact that, according to her, melancholy

29. Perhaps this is why Benjamin (1996) states: “that which mourns feels itself thoroughly known by the unknowable” (73).

strives against the impossibility of ending suffering, not for the possibility of ending it, since as it strives it also loses the hope that sorrow can be redeemed, but for the possibility of triggering anew political action. The following account of the Nazi experience in Germany by Habermas (1989) may be a good illustration of how this melancholic agency potentially contributes to renewing the ties of togetherness within a traumatized political community, without aiming at closure:

I first observed this reaction in others – in those who escaped the concentration camps, who had gone into hiding or emigrated – and who could show solidarity with those who did not survive the extermination operations only in an inexplicably self-tormenting way. By the criteria of personal guilt, this feeling is unfounded. But those who have come under the influence of this kind of melancholy act *as though* they could still somehow render the pastness of an irreparable calamity *less definitive* through a remembrance that shared in the suffering. (252; the emphasis is mine)

As redemptive as the shared experience of loss in the context of atrocities may appear in Butler's approach, according to Habermas' description, the melancholic agency emerging from that experience only makes way for a collective struggle against the irredeemable, knowing that it will nonetheless remain irredeemable.

In this regard, the introduction of alternative narratives about the past, such as a non-binary narrative of collective responsibility that rests on counter-remembering and thus on the idea that past suffering can be re-experienced in the present, appears as a "new place" for the political community, a new historic setting which nonetheless, cannot and should not take the place of the collective experience of loss. In Butler's (2003) words, "places are lost –destroyed, vacated barred- but then there is some new place and it is not the first, never can be the first" (468). Whatever this "new place" is, it exists in relation to that of loss, whose meaning it continuously reshapes.

Moreover, this new setting illustrates Arendt's notion of "new beginning" in the aftermath of political violence: a new start for political action that coexists with the loss and the necessary but necessarily unfulfilled task of redeeming the suffering engendered by that loss. As much as tragic recognition encourages the re-experiencing of suffering for the sake of redemption, that is, for the sake of the listeners' self-reconciliation regarding their past misdeeds, Arendt's theory aims at a kind of political engagement that goes beyond tragedy (Klusmeyer 2009), that is, beyond the inescapable paradoxes of action (Hirsch 2012) and the suffering that accompanies them. This ties in with the idea – outlined in the second chapter – that Arendt's work moves beyond tragedy through tragedy itself. Like Butler's "melancholic agency," which makes the suffering for loss productive by struggling against the irredeemable character of loss, the Arendtian political action is the expression of attempting to move beyond the tragic conundrums to which collective action leads, through re-experiencing the suffering that those conundrums entail.

2. Collective responsibility and re-membrance

Re-membrance builds upon remembrance and particularly, upon the struggles around the melancholic work of counter-remembering, a form of political agency that emerges after relations in the public space have been muted, foreclosed by violence. In fact, re-membrance is what comes after the dis-membrance of the political community – it only exists as related to that previous loss. According to Weiner (2005), by its etymology, the word "remember" conveys the idea of "re-member," that is, "bringing

together anew that which has become dismembered, disunited or forgotten” (86). A collective process of political forgiveness that builds upon a non-binary narrative of collective responsibility has the potential to re-member the political community, renewing the ties that bind together the members of that group in two ways.

Firstly, by counter-remembering, melancholy, as conceptualized by Benjamin and Butler, creates the inspiration for political engagement. In this regard, political forgiveness builds upon the shared memory of loss, relying on the redeeming experience of suffering it again, to move beyond loss and redemption. By relying on counter-remembering, a way to remember in which “remembrance is stretched by forgetting” (Brown 2001, 171, quoting Benjamin), political forgiveness unblocks the tragic political paralysis resulting from traumatizing experiences. Citing Shriver, Minow (1998) refers to remembering and forgetting those experiences as follows:

The mind that insulates the traumatic past from conscious memory plants a live bomb in the depths of the psyche [...]. But the mind that fixes on pain risks getting trapped in it. Too horrible to remember, too horrible to forget: down either path lies little health for the human sufferers of great evil. (17)

Linking this with Benjamin’s conceptualization of mindfulness, in which remembrance is stretched by forgetting, it could be said that, in order to remember, there is something that we need to collectively let go – a certain way of relating to the past and specifically, to the suffering for loss. We need to let go of the attachment of that suffering to past events, in order to make it contemporary, evoking and re-evoking it as present. In this regard, it is important to differentiate the act of detaching ourselves from past events, from the attempt to erase those events. The former act enables counter-remembering, that is, the re-experiencing in the present of the past suffering, while the latter attempt amounts to not remembering our suffering and as a result, radically bans counter-

remembering. However, both may be referred to as “forgetting”: for instance, in his book *Forgiveness* (2005), Jankélévitch associates forgiveness with forgetfulness, and forgetfulness with the effacement of the past: “in a single, radical, and incomprehensible movement, forgiveness effaces all, sweeps away all, and forgets all” (153).³⁰

Briefly, counter-remembering implies that the past belongs to us, but we do not belong to the past. It requires detaching ourselves from the unalterable past events in order to fully embrace in the present the suffering engendered by those past events.³¹ As Jankélévitch points out, time cannot affect the fact that there was an offense, but it can blur the effects of that offense. Counter-remembering enables us to preserve our suffering from being blurred by time and thus, to avoid falling into a kind of pseudo-forgiveness that is based on the erroneous idea that time erodes the gravity of the misdeed. In this regard, justice, which is to be sought, can clarify past events, approaching the factual truth and assigning legal responsibility, but it will not keep our collective memory alive. It will not counter-remember. As part of the work of acknowledging and assuming collective responsibility, counter-remembering is an exclusive political and collective task.

As founded on counter-remembering, political forgiveness entails a new beginning, a new place of collective memory, which, however, is not the first place. Although forgiveness and forgetfulness are easily associated with each other – as in the *leimotiv* of the Uruguayan human rights movement “neither forgetfulness nor

30. Moreover, in “Should we pardon them” (1996), Jankélévitch does not distinguish clearly between forgetfulness and forgiveness, and in *Forgiveness* (2005) he appears to contradict himself with regards to the relationship between those two concepts. He states, on the one hand, that “in order to forgive it is necessary to remember” (56), and, on the other hand, he argues that “forgiveness effaces all, sweeps away all, and forgets all” (153).

31. Interestingly, the Spanish word for “remember” is *recordar*, which means, by its etymology, “pass again through the heart” (*re-cordare*).

forgiveness: truth and justice” – political forgiveness as conceptualized here is at odds with sweeping the past away. If, following Borradori (2011), forgiveness is the always incomplete story about past violent events that we need to keep telling ourselves to survive as individuals and as a community, how can we keep telling a story of responsibility for a past that we do not remember? Remembering appears as a logical condition of possibility for an opened, unfinished process of political forgiveness which brings us as close as we can get to accomplishing the impossible task of addressing responsibility for past major wrongdoings. Yet it requires a certain detachment from the past.

In her analysis of Habermas’s unfulfillable duty of memory regarding Germany’s Nazi past, Thompson (2010) provides an excellent synthesis of the elements – remembrance, responsibility, self-reconciliation, and melancholy – that inform our conceptualization of counter-remembering:

What Habermas is suggesting is that whatever Germans do [...] there will always be a residue of responsibility that cannot be discharged. But the proper response is not for them to reconcile themselves to the existence of this impossibility, to turn away, and to get on with their lives with the satisfaction that they have done what is possible (even if that were so). Rather, it is to keep the memory of the injustices alive, to reflect on them, to feel melancholy. (273)

In sum, through the work of counter-remembering, and the melancholic agency it informs, we exercise memory but we detach ourselves from a self-satisfying way to relate to memory, a way to remember the past which blocks a collective process of responsabilization and political action for past atrocities, and thus togetherness itself. Political forgiveness contributes therefore to renew the ties that bind together a political community, not by resisting the detachment from past events but by struggling against not remembering our suffering.

Secondly, through its narrative of collective responsibility, political forgiveness potentially re-members the community by broadening the circle of sufferers, bestowing on them moral recognition and allowing them to tell their stories of responsibility. From the perspective of the citizen, telling one's own story of responsibility amounts to renewing one's belonging to that community. In Tavuchis' (1991) words,

when we respond to the call *after* the offense by apologizing, we are seeking reconfirmation of our credentials as members by publicly recalling their unstated grounds, that is, what we apparently forgot when we transgressed. [...] our participation in the ensuing exchange engages us (and our interlocutor[s]) in serious discourse about the moral requisites of interpersonal, group, or collective membership. (22)

Furthering this idea, a co-creative political apology may contribute to re-membering the community by encouraging its members to collectively remember the grounds on which political membership stands, fueling the discussion on political membership (Nobles 2008).³² Therefore, political apology may provide, at the same time, a setting for the renewal of the ties that bind a community together and for questioning and transforming those ties. The exercise of memory, by which we create and recreate our identity, is the opportunity to imagine the community. The survival of the collective ability to remember through telling our always precarious and incomprehensible stories of responsibility – that is, through political forgiveness – is therefore essential for the survival of the community as it is, but also for our ability to imagine what we want our community to become in the future. In this regard, political forgiveness is perhaps the most transformative version of remembrance.

32. Unlike Brown (2001), who states that both apologies and reparations aim at bringing suffering to an end, Nobles (2008) differentiates apologies from reparations precisely in that the former have a positive effect on opening a public discussion about the grounds of political membership and the rights associated with being a member of the community, while reparations tend to close that discussion.

3. “Time passes by”: the re-pre-sentation of sorrow and the imagined community

The masking does not precisely conceal, since what is lost cannot be recovered, but it marks the simultaneous condition of an irrecoverable loss that gives way to a reanimation of an evacuated world.

Butler 2003, 471, quoting Benjamin
“Afteward: After Loss, What Then?”

As pointed out for tragic recognition, theatrical representation is a privileged mechanism for counter-remembering, since it consists of making past events contemporary.³³ Particularly, representation enables conversation between individuals existing in different times, both on stage and between those on stage and the audience. By giving voice to all those who are currently unable to speak, representation challenges the impossible and potentially makes way for the miracle, relying uniquely on the collective work of imagination.

In an act that honors the Arendtian idea of politics, the audiovisual piece entitled “Time passes by” [“El tiempo pasa”],³⁴ made by the National Theatre Company of Uruguay in 2013 in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the 1973 coup d’état, recognizes the victims of crimes of state terrorism – assassination, torture, forced disappearance – and makes them miraculously re-appear in the public space by

33. In fact, by its etymology, the word “representation” implies a movement backwards, indicated by the prefix “pre,” and a movement forward, indicated by the prefix “re.”

34. 2013. Comedia Nacional, “El tiempo pasa,” official website of the National Theatre Company. Accessed December 7, 2014. <http://comedianacional.montevideo.gub.uy/node/234>.

representing their identities. It reminds the public and the political authorities that most of those who perpetrated the crimes against these victims remain unpunished.³⁵ Embodied in actors and actresses, some of those who were disappeared, tortured, and/or assassinated by the military and police forces in the lead years appear before the audience to tell their stories and remind their fellow citizens that their loved ones still wait for a response to their long-lasting demands of truth and justice. In this regard, this audiovisual piece can be seen as part of Yamazaki's (2004) co-creative process of apology, since it constitutes a dialogue between "past and present representations of history and regret" (156). According to the notion of political forgiveness that we have conceptualized here, "Time passes by" can be seen as a call for political forgiveness, an invitation to struggle against its paradoxes and persist in the path of collective responsibility, telling each other, time and again, incomplete and incomprehensible stories of responsibility. In this regard, "Time passes by" dramatizes how the realm of the impossible may be a fecund place for the possible.

The moment of representation has the singularity of an event, but it is the event of presenting the past again, by voicing the stories of people killed or disappeared decades ago to those who live in the present. The suffering of these tragic heroes, and ours, as their listeners and as the subjects of our own tragedies, is unspeakable, but it does not remain unspoken. The assassinated and the disappeared are unable to speak in the

35. The political intention of this documentary was to remind the Uruguayan people and their political authorities about the fact that the victims of state terrorism and their families still wait for justice. They demand that the perpetrators be punished and that the whereabouts of their loved ones be revealed. There are stories to be told that are not represented – stories where the perpetrator was not the state. This expresses again the divisions that pervade Uruguayan society. However, this documentary makes a significant contribution to the collective process of unsilencing stories of suffering and political responsibility. It is a contribution to be celebrated, since the stories represented in the documentary can serve as the inspiration for the representation of others, filling the gaps in collective memory, and eventually challenging a binary narrative of the past.

present. However, through representation, that impossibility is challenged: they appear on stage and thus in our collective imagination, but they appear to remind us that they remain absent. The dead and the disappeared re-appear and speak, on behalf of the members of their families who died in waiting and even of those who are present, who still wait for justice. The absent, now present, turn us into their interlocutors and, potentially, into those who will represent them politically. Paradoxically, the victims of political crimes need to be aesthetically and politically re-presented because they cannot be present: their voices will fade, but they may reverberate through time in our own.

In this sense, representation struggles against the boundaries of temporality, and re-presents, enabling the voices of the disappeared people to reach us and hold us accountable for how we deal in our present with what was their present – in fact, they speak in present tense during the entire piece. “Time passes by” returns to us, as members of the same political community to which they belonged and to which they belong presently under the status of victims of political crimes, the responsibility to act politically about the past events, beyond the roles we played in the past, and even if we were not part of that past. “Time passes by” can thus be seen as a plural, transgenerational call to echo the voices of the sufferers who are represented in the piece and make the voices of other sufferers resonate as well, by telling our various stories of responsibility, thus thickening the weave of stories that constitutes collective memory. It shows that there is room to renew the promise of togetherness on different grounds, re-imagining the community as one where a shared sense of loss makes way for a shared sense of belonging, by broadening the circle of sufferers and counter-remembering our irredeemable sorrow in multiple, discrepant stories that interfere with each other.

Postlude

The story of the beginning

To mourn [...] those whose grief is inconsolable, whose injury no justice can repair,
is not to believe that there is nothing but repetition. Instead,
it is to activate a sensibility of time that is at once recursive and cumulative rather than
successive and teleological, a sensibility of time that,
however forgotten, is not forgetful.

Scott 2014, 96

Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, and Justice

After telling me what it felt like to come back to Uruguay after ten years in exile, and how it feels until today, Rita gave me the figure of a Matryoshka and a piece of paper with the story of the famous Russian doll and her daughters. Rita emigrated to Sweden during the Uruguayan dictatorship. She now has a toy studio, “Tussilago”, named after a flower that she used to see blossom in the Swedish spring. Matryoshka’s is the story of the beginning and, as Rita’s, it is the story of beginning again, and again, and again.

I grew up in a society pervaded by the divisions regarding how to deal with the legacy of the lead years, a miscellany of stories like Rita’s. Since my early childhood, I heard stories from people identifying themselves with the claims of one or the other “side” of the “war” to which Mujica refers in his speeches, and other people arguing that they did not agree with either “side”. I remember the story that my mother told me about going to the University and being caught in the middle of street confrontations, and being paralyzed by fear, or the story about the classmate of hers who joined the MLN-T and

that she never saw again. I remember the stories that my father told me about how he got the letter “C”³⁶ because his name was among the early activists of one of the groups that became the germ of the leftist coalition, or how he and other young Agronomy students helped a *Tupamaro* friend hide. I remember the story of that laborer who used to be my mother’s neighbor at their family farm, and was killed by the revolutionary movement because he found one of its secret places by accident. I remember the story about my the partner of a very good friend of my mother’s who disappeared. I remember the story that a classmate of mine used to talk about in grade 4 or 5 about that friend of her father who was deaf because of the tortures he underwent. I remember the day I entered the Faculty of Social Sciences in Montevideo and saw a poster: “Don’t vote on *Acción* [a student union with ties to the Colorado Party]. On their list there is the name of the son of a torturer.” The “son of a torturer” was a classmate of mine. His father was one of the top authorities of the Armed Forces during the dictatorial period in Uruguay, and even in democracy. I remember him saying that one of his father’s closest friends, a well-known torturer, had an affective role in his life – he was “like an uncle” for him. I remember a conversation with a General from the Army who said that in Uruguay only seven people were disappeared. And I remember the mute silence of the main avenue of Montevideo overfilled every May when the families and friends of the victims of forced disappearance march carrying banners with the pictures of their loved ones. Each story is unique and nonetheless, all these stories speak of the same feeling of collective, irreconcilable pain that passes onto each new generation.

1. During the dictatorial period in Uruguay, the civic-military government would classify citizens depending on their sympathy and link with groups considered to be leftist and thus, subversive. Those who received the letter “B” could still get government jobs, but those who received the letter “C” could not. In fact, it was common to see public servants being relieved from their positions with the argument that they had a connection with such groups.

This dissertation speaks of an intellectual journey, but also of an affective one. It was a journey through the universe of stories to which I belong, coming closer to understanding how much my own story is carved within others' and how much these others' stories are carved within mine. The authors I bring into the conversation were companions in this journey, which is or was once, their own. It was by exploring their stories of the beginning that I found myself exploring my own, with a tragic and nonetheless urgent need to tell it.

In these pages I sought to make sense of how all the individual stories merge into a collective one marked by the darkest grief, but also blessed with miracle. Because I did not speak natively the same language as my real listeners and my imagined readers, the need to express in one language the stories that I remembered or dreamt of in another reshaped them. Telling in English stories about what was unspeakable in Spanish, paradoxically, helped me put the unspeakable into another light, and ultimately, honor it. This work is not the result of any sort of translation. It is the result of telling for the first time my own story of the beginning. It was by thinking about *forgiveness* that I could tell my story about *perdón* [forgiveness in Spanish], as insurmountably sorrowful and unfinished, which is why it remains unspeakable. It is a story that calls for a step into a hyperbolic version of responsibility, which is what collective responsibility means to me. Particularly, the work of understanding *perdón* by thinking about *forgiveness* enabled me to engage in a conversation with the stories of others, thus re-opening exchanges that I had assumed were annulled. This was essential in elaborating the idea of an alternative narrative of the past, distinct from the ones that had shaped my memory and perhaps previously foreclosed those exchanges.

The idea of *perdón* in politics is inseparable for me from those stories of others, in which I was sometimes a witness and sometimes an actor but which are my own, stories that speak of collective scars that remain unhealed. As said by one of the political actors cited through these pages, these are scars that can only be caressed. Arguing for closure, or conceiving political forgiveness as potentially replacing justice, amounts to not recognizing the individual and collective suffering of my people which I feel compelled to honor. It would amount to denying who I am. However, I believe that relying exclusively on justice to address the breaches opened in our community by wrongdoings carried out during the lead years is an act of irresponsibility. It means to leave unfulfilled the promise that we made to each other at the restoration of democracy, of pursuing our destiny together. This is a promise that we can only aim at fulfilling collectively and thus, politically.

This work is about that promise. It is my defense of that promise as a permanent struggle. The exercise of conceptualizing political forgiveness as conceptually impossible, to think about it as an inconceivable, tragic event, is informed by my personal urge to think about collective action in *post*-political-violence scenarios as a struggle which takes place against the backdrop of a suffering that I need to honor. More broadly, this exercise speaks of the drive to think about intellectual work at its limit of possibility. As pointed out when referring to Butler's approach, melancholy has its expression at an epistemological level. It results from the somehow tragic experience of the fullness of the object of knowledge as elusive. These pages are tinged with that melancholy, which – just as it does with regard to loss in the aftermath of political violence – challenges motionlessness and enables action, in the form of a recursive grasp of temporality. The

latter underlies not only the work of mourning, as pointed out before, but also the work of understanding that mourning, in which we are subjectively involved and through which we are thus constantly modified. Matryoshkas are an allegory of that recursivity. They mimic a way to remember and a way to approach remembrance as fractals, thus breaking linearity: there is no end to the story, no comfortable *dénouement* or resolution – only permanent re-evocation of that story and its reminiscences. In this regard, the story of Matryoshka is also an allegory of how strong the temptation to foreclose the particular temporality of suffering can be – as strong as the carpenter’s temptation to carve an end from inside Matryoshka. However, this temporality of permanent re-evocation, this work of carving memory, does not necessarily amount to an endless – and eventually meaningless – repetition. It may breathe transformation into political life. Telling stories is not redemptive in that it does not bring suffering to a synthesis and thus to an end, but it has the potential to sublimate that suffering, enabling the diversification of its narratives.

This is my attempt to caress scars by telling a collective story of responsibility. It is an expression of a personal wish for a different beginning that needs to honor our ancestral struggles as much as the promises made to our descendants. By the end of this journey, I am as far as I have ever been from the end of any story, and a bit closer to the beginning – or should I say, to the multiple beginnings – of a story that, like Matryoshka, was created only to promise more wood to carve, more beginnings to give birth to, more stories to tell.

References

- Acosta López, María Del Rosario. 2012. "Hegel and Derrida on Forgiveness: The Impossible at the Core of the Political." *Derrida Today* 5 (1): 55-68. DOI: 10.3366/drt.2012.0028.
- Alfonso, Álvaro. 2012. *Los dos demonios*. Montevideo: editorial Planeta.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1994a. *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- . 1994b. "The Accused", in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books.
- . 1995. *Men in Dark Times*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co.
- . 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University Chicago Press.
- . 2003. *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- . 2006. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin Books
- Benjamin, Walter. 1996. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bernstein, Richard. 2006. "Derrida: the Aporia of Forgiveness?" *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory* 13 (3): 394-406.
<http://www.constellationsjournal.org> and
<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca>
- Borradori, Giovanna. 2011. "Living with the Irreparable: a Critique of Derrida's Theory of Forgiveness." *Parallax* 17 (1): 78-88. DOI: 10.1080/13534645.2011.531181
- Butler, Judith. 2003. "Afterword: After Loss, What Then". In *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brown, Wendy. 2001. "Futures. Specters and Angels: Benjamin and Derrida." In *Politics out of History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

---. 2003. "Resisting Left Melancholia." In *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Daye, Russel. 2004. *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Derrida, Jacques. 2001. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. New York: Routledge.

---. 2001. "To Forgive: the Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible". In *Questioning God*, edited by John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Scanlon, Michael J.. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Digeser, Peter. 2001. *Political Forgiveness*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Doxtader, Erik. 2007. "The Faith and Struggle of Beginning (with) Words: on the Turn between Reconciliation and Recognition." In *Philosophy and Rhetoric: Redrawing their Intellectual Landscape*, edited by Gerard A. Hauser, 119-47. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press Language

Eisinger, Robert. 2011. "The Political Non-Apology." *Society* 48 (2): 136-41.

Goffman, Erving. 1971. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*. New York: Harper and Row.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, edited and translated by Shierry Weber Nicholse. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Havel, Václav. 1997. *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice. Speeches and Writings, 1990-1996*, translated by Paul Wilson and others. New York: Knopf.

Hegel, G. W. F.. 1971. "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate." In *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Muller, Steven. 1998. "Lessons from the Past, Visions for the Future, the Speeches of Roman Herzog." *German Issues* 18. American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS), The Johns Hopkins University.

Hirsch, Alexander. 2013. "The Promise of the Unforgiven: Violence, Power and Paradox in Arendt". *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39 (1): 45-61.
<http://psc.sagepub.com/content/39/1/45>

Hollander, Dana. 2012. "Contested Forgiveness: Jankélévitch, Lévinas, and Derrida at the Colloque des intellectuels juifs." In *Living Together: Jacques Derrida's Communities of Violence and Peace*, edited by Elizabeth Weber. New York: Fordham University Press.

- Jankélévitch, Vladimir. 2005. *Forgiveness*. Translated by Andrew Kelley. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jankélévitch, Vladimir and Hobart, Ann. 1996. "Should We Pardon Them?" *Critical Inquiry* 22 (3): 552-72. University of Chicago Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/stable/1344023>
- Klusmeyer, Douglas. 2009. "Beyond Tragedy: Hannah Arendt and Hans Morgenthau on Responsibility, Evil and Political Ethics". *International Studies Review* 11(2): 332-51. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2486.2009.00851.x.
- Lazare, Aaron. 2004. *On Apology*. Oxford; New York: Oxford Press University.
- Lotz, Christian. 2006. "The Events of Morality and Forgiveness: From Kant to Derrida." *Research in Phenomenology*, 36: 255-73. DOI: 10.1163/156916406779165971
- Minow, Martha. 1998. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Negash, Girma. 2006. *Apologia Politica: States & Their Apologies by Proxy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Nobles, Melissa. 2008. *The Politics of Official Apologies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosencof, Mauricio. 2010. *Las cartas que no llegaron*. Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana.
- Scott, David. 2014. *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Tavuchis, Nicholas. 1991. *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Thompson, Janna. 2010. "Is Apology a Sorry Affair? Derrida and the Moral Force of the Impossible." *Philosophical Forum* 41 (3) 259-74. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9191.2010.00362.x
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 2010. *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*. Translated by Gila Walker. London; New York: Seagull Books.
- Tutu, Desmond. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.
- Yamazaki, Jane. 2004. "Crafting the Apology: Japanese apology to South Korea in 1990." *Asian Journal of Communication* 14 (2): 156-73. DOI: 10.1080/0129298042000256776

Weiner, Brian. 2005. *Sins of the Parents: The Politics of National Apologies in the United States*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.