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CHAPTER 2

More than a nice ritual

Official apologies as a rhetorical act in need of theoretical re-conceptualization

Lisa Storm Villadsen

Official apologies are public statements of regret presented in the name of collectivities such as nation states, governments, or religious institutions for wrongful actions in the past. This paper argues that we need a theoretical re-conceptualization of the genre in order to better understand its role in civic life. Regarding official apologies as an instantiation of *rhetorical citizenship* is more productive than regarding them as analogous to interpersonal apologies because they have less to do with forgiveness than commonly assumed. Rather, one of their main functions is to confront and argue about *endoxa*, commonly accepted opinions, and how they have been ignored or distorted in practice. In this way, official apologies have the potential to serve as an occasion and forum for public discourse on the norms and values informing that community at a given point in time.

1. Introduction

Apologies are everywhere in the public sphere. Sports stars and celebrities are often seen in the role of the penitent, seeking forbearance from their fans for misbehavior such as illegitimate sex or drug abuse. Politicians, too, are regular performers of public apologies whether for transgressions in their private lives or for political offenses. News and entertainment media abound with headlines about public apologies given – or demanded –by some offended party. This public interest in the topic alone is enough to warrant it as a topic for inquiry into issues of rhetoric in society.

Add to this that public apologies raise theoretical questions, prompting us to consider, among many other matters, the meaningfulness of apologies given by proxy. Some of the common concerns regarding the meaningfulness of official apologies stem, I argue, from their being understood in frameworks that

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raise misleading expectations, namely understanding them as either versions of *apologia* or simply as large scale apologies as we know them from interpersonal relations, to be dealt with by speech act theory. I argue that official apologies differ both from speeches of self-defense (apologia) and from interpersonal apologies and therefore should be understood on their own terms as a distinct kind of rhetoric requiring other theoretical tools than e.g. speech act theory. I point specifically to theory that can account for their proto-political nature. In this sense official apologies constitute a form of moral argument, the purpose of which is to relate particular policies to shared norms and to respond appropriately where transgressions have occurred. My hypothesis is that rhetorical studies can contribute to scholarly understanding of official apologies in several respects and thereby complement existing scholarship in philosophy, linguistic pragmatics, sociology, and political science.

The argument proceeds as follows: In the first section I define and illustrate what official apologies are. I compare them with speeches of self-defense (apologia) and then discuss similarities and differences between official apologies and interpersonal apologies. All of this to make the point that official apologies, while sharing family resemblances with these other types of *mea culpas*, make up a category of their own and thus should be analyzed on their own terms. Then follows a section where I review a small selection of recent scholarship on official apologies, primarily in the fields of political science and philosophy – areas where the study of official apologies has yielded valuable insights. This leads to a section where I show how rhetorical studies can contribute to this cross-disciplinary effort in understanding the significance and function of official apologies.

2. Official apology/apologia – what's the difference?

One of the reasons the topic of apologies seems so prevalent in the media is that journalists seldom distinguish between different kinds of apologetic discourse. They are likely to lump together anything from an actor's public admission of drug abuse over a CEO's regret that faulty products caused harm to consumers to a prime minister's apology for state-sponsored racist policies. Given the rather heterogeneous forms and purposes of such utterances, I think it is important to make distinctions between different kinds of statements of regret; whereas some primarily serve functions of image restoration (e.g. the celebrity caught red-handed in unsavoury behaviour), others have deeper social resonance (e.g., a government acknowledging how racist assumptions influenced state-sponsored treatment of particular population groups). While morality plays a role in all of them, some have the appeal of scandal and public humiliation of the high and

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mighty, whereas others deal with longstanding social and political issues that are less spectacular (but all the more difficult to come to terms with). Here, I shall limit the discussion to a distinction between apologia and apology[1] and then explain how collective apologies differ from interpersonal apologies.

In traditional rhetorical theory, an *apologia* is the speech of self-defence where speakers are concerned with restoring their image and do so by *denying, differentiating, or transferring* guilt away from themselves.[2] American politics offer multiple examples; just think of Richard Nixon's so-called "Checkers" speech (Nixon, 1952). Information had emerged about a political fund, maintained by supporters to reimburse Nixon for his political expenses, and this exposed him to allegations of a possible conflict of interests, which again led to a demand that he step down as Eisenhower's candidate for Vice-president. Nixon went on TV and gave a speech in which he painted a portrait of himself as a decent man of modest means who had not received any illegitimate support, but did admit to receiving a puppy, named Checkers by his daughter, a pet he was not willing to return to the donors out of consideration for his daughter's feelings. Another well-known example is Bill Clinton's initial responses to allegations of sexual misconduct with Monica Lewinsky where he both denied such behavior and argued that the allegations were politically motivated.[3]

In contrast, an *apology* is characterized by being based on *acceptance* and *admittance* of guilt/responsibility and is primarily concerned with repairing damaged social relations. Most apologies occur in interpersonal settings, e.g. a parent to a child for overreacting to a minor misbehavior or one colleague for snapping at another without good reason. But sometimes the term apology is used in connection with more public interactions. As an example of a many-to-one apology, the late Alan Turing, mastermind behind breaking the Nazis' codes during WWII and a pioneer in computer science, received a posthumous apology from the British government in 2009 for the chauvinistic way he was treated by the state when in 1952 he was convicted of "gross indecency" (i.e. for being gay) and presented with the choice of prison or chemical castration. Turing opted for the latter, but

1. Arguably, a relevant intermediary category is crisis communication, e.g. when large corporations not only seek to deal with criticism or failure on a short term basis but use the occasion for more structural changes including policies regarding corporate social responsibility. The focus of this chapter and space does not allow me to explore this here.

2. Apologia has interested rhetorical critics for decades. B. L. Ware and Will A. Linkugel's important early article, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," assumed apologia to be a genre in itself and suggested both a terminology and a methodology for studying speeches given in defense of one's character (1973).

3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewinsky_scandal

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took his own life in 1954.[4] An example of a many-to-many apology is former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd who in 2008, as his first act of office, apologized to the indigenous groups known as "The Stolen Generations". These were thousands of so-called "half-caste" children who for decades were forcibly removed from their usually aboriginal families and put in orphanages or residential schools in an attempt to bring them up as "whites" and effectively deprived them of their birth family and culture.

Figuratively speaking, an apologia seeks to "close" an embarrassing chapter in order to get on with life as normal, preferably with an intact reputation. Apologies, by contrast, "open up" that chapter in order to learn from it and allow it to serve functions of atonement, reconciliation, and, as I shall argue later, occasionally civic reconstruction (see also Villadsen, 2008). Based on this analysis of the differences, we may conclude that most of the so-called apologies in the daily news stream would be more properly labeled if referred to as apologiae[5] since they serve functions of image restoration more than sincere efforts at moral reconciliation.

3. Official apologies are not simply large-scale interpersonal apologies

We often instinctively approach official apologies as if they were similar to the apologies we are familiar with from our interpersonal relations. This is natural since official apologies share several of the traits and functions that make apologies constructive in interpersonal relations. Foremost among these similarities we find that the expression of certain feelings (such as shame, regret, and humility) and the use of certain words (such as "I'm sorry" or "I apologize") can at times significantly repair social relations and foster reconciliation. In spite of these similarities, a central point in this chapter is that official apologies should be approached theoretically and critically on their own terms and not as non-paradigmatic versions of the interpersonal apology. I will show that official apologies are not simply interpersonal apologies writ large nor lend themselves completely to analysis by for example speech act theory.

The comparison between interpersonal and official apologies is problematic in several respects. One reason is that the affective aspects of apology in interpersonal exchanges are different than in collective settings. I have mentioned the

4. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/gordon-brown/6170112/Gordon-Brown-Im-proud-to-say-sorry-to-a-real-war-hero.html

5. Apologiae is the plural form of apologia.

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feeling of remorse or regret we expect in a person offering an apology to someone else. An insincere apology is often worse than no apology at all because it adds the insult of feigning emotion to whatever injury is in question and thus undermines the social relationship between wrongdoer and victim even further. But sincerity in an emotional sense is not a useful requirement in an official apology – it is hardly reasonable to demand that an official representative apologizing on behalf of a collective, perhaps for wrongs committed long before that person's birth, should be personally tormented by remorse. Govier and Verwoerd, with their victim-oriented focus on the moral function of institutional acknowledgement, argue for "an understanding of institutional apologies that is not undermined by the lack, or relative lack, of the expression of emotion in the institutional or collective case. It is not crucial that acknowledgement be expressed through the *emotion* of an institutional representative" (2002, p. 74, emphasis in original). The important thing is public acknowledgement of the injustice visited on the victims, and of their dignity. This acknowledgement constitutes a kind of moral argument that might be represented thus: "You, group A, was treated in X way by us, group B, without good cause. X is a violation of Y moral norm as held as part of *endoxa* (generally accepted opinions and norms such as "Children should be treated with care and love" or "It is wrong to humiliate another person") and perhaps even formally confirmed by group B (for example by signing the UN Charter of Human Rights). Therefore, group A is entitled to an apology from group B, and group B in need of critical introspection and recommitment to Y moral norm in order for groups A and B to be able to trust and respect each other in the future."

Another problem concerns the recipient's affective response. It is presumed that a request for forgiveness is a constitutive element of an apology. For example, sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis posits the aim of an apology as "forgiveness as a prelude to reunion and reconciliation" (1991, p. 22). Also in other theoretical descriptions we find a similar coupling of apology with a request for forgiveness, e.g. in psychologist Aron Lazare, who regards apology and forgiveness as "inextricably bound together" (2004, p. 229).[6] Similarly, among the five constitutive characteristics of what rhetoricians Koesten and Rowland call "the rhetoric of atonement", they list as the first one that the rhetor must "acknowledge wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness" (2004, p. 73). There are also theoretical discussions that tie the two even closer together. Political scientist Nava Löwenheim completely conflates apology and forgiveness, seeing apology in terms of a "request for forgiveness" and among the five requirements of the definition lists "an expectation of being forgiven (a desire to make amends and reconcile)" (2009, p. 538).

6. Significantly, Lazare is primarily interested in interpersonal apologies and much less in collective apologies.

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In my view, this tendency to link apology and forgiveness springs from an overreliance on the comparison with interpersonal apology as well as from a somewhat uncritical adoption of religious conceptions of confession and forgiveness.[7] I believe it is misguided to posit forgiveness as *the* aim of apologies. Less will sometimes do – as long as there is acknowledgement of wrongdoing, commitment to non-repetition on the part of the wrongdoer, and mutual recognition of shared norms (such that the victim is assured that he or she was undeserving of the ill-treatment and feels his or her position as an equal restored). This is all the more so for official apologies. To assume as a requirement for success (or just meaningfulness) that official apologies must be met with forgiveness by the wronged group is mistaken. The point of an official apology is social reconciliation based on mutual acceptance and acknowledgement, i.e. on civic norms and *endoxa*, not personal emotions. Former victims are entitled to feel resentment over past wrongs even after they decide to accept an apology. Indeed, suggesting that forgiveness would be a welcome reaction to an official apology arguably constitutes an added unreasonable pressure on the victims, perpetuating the imbalance in the relationship since the apologizer now "dictates" what an appropriate reaction to the apology would be.

Philosopher Charles Griswold similarly argues that although official apologies (which he calls political apologies) share important functions with interpersonal apologies, we should not understand political apology as a kind of "non-paradigmatic forgiveness" (2007, p. 138). Among the reasons he lists for why political apology should be treated as its own species are these: the sheer complexity in terms of chronology, accountability, and multiplicity of interests and perspectives in the public realm; the fact that political apology will always be "inflected" in accordance with anticipated consequences and thus mixes moral concerns with issues of "money, liability, and power" (p. 139); and finally the fact that unlike interpersonal apology, political apology is inseparable from issues of representation. The fact that political apologies are often given – and received – by proxy makes for very different conditions; personal sentiment, so crucial in interpersonal apology, cannot be upheld as a relevant standard (p. 140). A similar point of view is presented by philosopher Marguerite La Caze who claims that apology and forgiveness are "asymmetrical" and should not be linked, the reason being that apology is based on respect (and is as such a civic duty and can be a public act), whereas forgiveness is based on love (and as such is discretionary and is a personal undertaking) (2006, p. 447).

7. For a discussion of the culture of public confession in an American context, see Bauer (2008).

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I now hope to have shown that official apologies cannot adequately be explained by simple analogy with interpersonal apologies. As we turn to a discussion of why I see a need for a broader theoretical grounding for understanding official apologies, we take our starting point in the most common theoretical source for understanding the phenomenon: speech act theory.

4. The need for a broader theoretical framework for understanding official apologies

Official apologies have often been discussed in a framework of speech act theory by, e.g., Tavuchis (1991, pp. 22–32), and Lazare (2004). Again, this is natural because the idea that words can act is a robust basic frame for explaining the so-called paradox and "mystery" of apology, namely that although apologies cannot undo the past, the right words at the right time can nevertheless help estranged people move on (Tavuchis, 1991, p. 5).

However, speech act theory is too narrow a frame for understanding the nature and functions of public apologies, and is really only superficially suited for a full inquiry into this phenomenon. Philosopher Nick Smith has offered a painstaking analysis of the numerous difficulties in evaluating interpersonal apologies by means of speech act theory (2008, pp. 18–21, and pp. 28–107). It is clear that many of the basic requirements for an interpersonal apology are not meaningful in a larger setting involving groups of people rather than individuals (e.g., direct, personal responsibility for the wrong committed and sincere regret on the part of the wrongdoer). With collective apologies the problems concerning issues of consensus (among the apologizers), causation, blame and responsibility, and standing are even knottier. But however useful Smith's analysis is in detecting pseudo-apologies and criticizing what is problematic about them, I think that his highly idealistic regulative ideal, the "categorical apology," risks occluding more pragmatic concerns and a more constructive approach.

In fairness, Smith does aim at describing the social benefits that may spring from apologies, and while he admits that official apologies by his analysis very rarely meet the ideal, they can "serve as declarations of values and intentions of members of a group" (p. 203) and "have considerable restorative power over a culture's moral, social, and political health" (p. 233). However, by virtue of the analytical nature of his work, Smith's nod at the civically constructive potential of collective apologies remains at this general level and does not extend to either theoretical discussion or citing examples illustrating his point. My aim is to further the discussion of how official apologies may serve these value declaring and

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restorative functions, in other words, what brings them into the realm of public argument.

To better understand the collective social benefits of apologies, we need a theoretical framework that can account for the social and ritualistic functions of the genre. Moral philosophy and linguistic pragmatics provide valuable concepts for analyzing specific aspects of apologies, but for official apologies, we need theory to help understand their function on a societal and political level. Political science can contribute here, and so can rhetorical studies. But before we consider these theoretical perspectives, a definition and some exemplification may be useful.

5. Official apologies defined and exemplified

Now that I have tried to delimit official apologies from other kinds of regretful utterances, it's time to contribute in more positive terms to a definition of the phenomenon.

Philosopher Janna Thompson has offered this very concise definition: "A political apology is an official apology given by a representative of a state, corporation, or other organized group to victims, or descendants of victims, for injustices committed by the group's members" (2008, p. 31). Thompson highlights the representative and collective nature of public apologies. I share her basic understanding and am sympathetic to her emphasis on the role this kind of apology plays in politics, but I hesitate to call such apologies "political" for two reasons. First, the predicate "political" is likely to be construed as saying that such apologies are merely a superficial way of dealing with special pleading rather than an expression of deep-seated endoxa; this skepticism is analogous to the way "political correctness" is used as a derogatory term. Second, while I agree with Thompson that official apologies serve important functions of a political or civic nature, I am not convinced that "political" is the most accurate description of the genre because it may suggests a narrowly partisan political agenda. By using the predicate political, we risk losing sight of other relevant factors such as historical and ethical aspects of the matters. We need to account for the broader ideological views informing this kind of rhetoric, but since these are by no means the same from case to case, I will refer to this kind of rhetoric as "official apologies" defined as "statements issued by an official on behalf of a public collective (such as a nation state or a government) to apologize for wrongful deeds done in the past" (Villadsen, 2008, p. 25).

Let's look at a few examples. Official apologies are often given by a group in some sort of powerful position vis à vis the group receiving the apology; it might be a majority group (ethnic, religious, or other) to a minority group (e.g.

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Norwegian King Harald V apologizing to the Sami and Kven minorities for a government program known as Norwegianization aimed at assimilating "non-Norwegian," native-speaking groups into an ethnically and culturally uniform Norwegian population), or a former colonizer to the formerly colonized. Queen Elizabeth II thus approved legislation that "apologized unreservedly" to the Maori population in New Zealand for taking their land in 1863 (see Nobles, 2008, pp. 8–9 and 159). Other examples include state leaders apologizing for government failings with regard to past treatment of particular, marginalized population groups such as the physically or mentally ill or orphans, e.g. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to former students at Indian residential schools (Harper, 2008), or for particular political malpractices, such as UK Prime Minster David Cameron's apology for police brutality on "Bloody Sunday," where 13 civilians were killed by police fire during a demonstration in Derry, Northern Ireland, in 1972 (Cameron, 2012). A third example is President Clinton who apologized for a forty-year federally sanctioned medical study in Tuskegee, Alabama, where male African-American subjects believing they were in treatment were really being withheld treatment for the syphilis they suffered from in order to observe the natural progression of the disease (Clinton, 1997).

Official apologies thus serve as a discursive frame for an institution to publicly *acknowledge* wrongful actions done in its name and to *take responsibility* for them. By way of addressing the apology to the wronged group or its representatives, the institution signals a sense of heightened *political commitment* to that particular group and singles it out as deserving of special attention (e.g. political, economic, or cultural) to make up for past wrongs and better its conditions and standing in society.

6. Official apologies read as a form of politics and a means of civic (re)construction

So far, I have mostly referred to apology theory stemming from sociology, philosophy, and psychology, but in recent years, the topic of official apologies has interested researchers from international and human rights law, cultural and memory studies, as well political science, the latter primarily with an eye to the role of official apologies in the political life of and between nations. While this is not the place for a literature review, I want to briefly mention two examples of work done in political science that exemplify the broader, and more pragmatic (as opposed to morally oriented) approach to the study of official apologies.

In *The Politics of Official Apologies*, Melissa Nobles reads official apologies as discursive frames for policy building. In other words, Nobles examines official

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apologies as a form of politics. Her *membership theory of apologies* explains the political function of official apologies as reinterpretations of history in combination with morally based arguments regarding group and individual rights to reshape the meanings of political membership (2008, p. 36). "Apologies," writes Nobles, "help to shape politics, by publicly acknowledging injustice and by registering support of certain views of national membership and history while displacing others" (p. 3). While Nobles doesn't talk about argumentation as such, we see her linking official apologies to the shaping of politics. In an interesting analysis, she argues that symbolic politics is inseparable from other forms of political action. Against the claim that symbolic politics promotes a "victim mentality," she points out that constructive political potential may grow out of group agency and autonomy and that arguing within and across societal groupings benefits a national understanding of citizenship. In official apologies, arguments about particular moral judgments of the past and our present obligations meet, and this interpretive struggle is constitutive of our political communities.

Nobles's book points to the symbolic and civic importance of apologies in the political realm. She argues that apologies function as a site for supporting particular political ideas and, when given, provide proof of official recognition of certain communal obligations. Hence, official apologies can be used as platforms for announcing new policy directions and promoting societal reconciliation (p. 111) – both good examples of what it might mean to think of citizenship as discursively based.

In *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* Jennifer Lind, another political scientist, takes a more affect-oriented approach as she studies how official apologies affect the receiving group: do they trust and accept what they hear – and if not, why? Lind's primary accomplishment is her attention to the risk of backlash and its toxic effects on countries' attempts to repair relations when apologies already have been given. She suggests persuasively that official apologies must build on a strong political mandate for negotiators on either side to be able to withstand domestic resistance to apologetic remembrance. While Lind's analyses show attention to the language employed in official apologies and to questions of agency (understood in this context as political and societal mandate for a particular apology), they stop short of a closer examination of the rhetoric of international apology.

In these two examples, we find an understanding of the rhetorical practice of official apologies as a site of development and negotiation of civic norms and terms of civic membership. What's missing is closer attention to the actual wording of official apologies and a more nuanced appreciation of the significance of the ceremonial aspect of official apologies. These are two aspects in which I claim rhetorical theory can deepen our understanding of official apologies.

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7. Rhetorical resources for re-conceptualizing official apologies

I suggest that we begin to develop an alternative theoretical frame for understanding official apologies by re-conceptualizing this genre as a *public rhetoric of norms and values* not unlike the classical genre of epideictic rhetoric. In the words of Pablo de Grieff from the International Center for Transitional Justice, "it is the norm-affirming function of apologies that helps us understand the potential contribution apologies can make to reconciliation" (2008, p. 131). Similarly, Smith concedes that collective apologies can "serve as declarations of values and intentions of members of a group" (2008, p. 203) and "have considerable restorative power over a culture's moral, social, and political health" (p. 233). As I have argued elsewhere, following work by rhetoricians Christine Oravec and Gerard Hauser on the didactic function of epideictic rhetoric, approaching official apologies as instantiations of epideictic rhetoric reveals how they thematize collective values both implicitly and explicitly, condemning certain behavior or certain views and inviting the audience to distance themselves from such acts or beliefs (Villadsen, 2008). Via a public recognition of a breach of particular norms or *endoxa*, the official apology at the same time identifies the values deemed appropriate and constitutes a renewed statement of commitment to them. Thus, when President Bill Clinton apologized to the African-Americans who had been duped into a medical experiment that allowed a treatable disease to ravage them untreated, he did not mince words in articulating the normative orientation that let this take place for 40 years: "To our African American citizens, I am sorry that your federal government orchestrated a study so clearly racist" (1997). This explicitness is important for the value of an apology because it states for perpetrator and victim as well as their respective associates precisely the nature of the transgression. Such precision can guard against the uncertainty bound to accompany a euphemistic apology that only refers to the events in question as "unfortunate" or "regrettable" as for example in the Japanese emperor Hirohito's phrase "An Unhappy Phase in a Certain Period" (see Lind, 2008, p. 26). In Canada, Prime Minister Harper's aforementioned apology similarly takes it upon itself to identify the values and assumptions informing former wrongful actions and to explicitly condemn them: "Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption that aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, 'to kill the Indian in the child.' Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country" (2008). By explicating or reformulating a normative groundwork for the community, the official apology

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can thus mark a symbolic transfer from one understanding of the collective self to another – strengthened through the acknowledgement of fault and vitalized through renewed ethical commitment.

To sum up, thinking of official apologies from a perspective of epideictic rhetoric allows us to focus on the function of naming and defining community values that have somehow been violated or ignored. The epideictic angle thus allows us to not only appreciate the ritualistic aspect of official apologies, but also their role in educating the community about the importance of upholding particular societal values.

This leads us into a discussion of the potential role of official apologies as forward-looking statements that participate in community building that not only reflect a community's normative orientation at a given time, but also function as a site of normative development in themselves. As Celeste Michelle Condit has argued, public morality is constructed by collectivities "through their public discourse in a process of reflexive reproduction that utilizes the capacity of discourse simultaneously to create, extend, and apply moral concepts" (1999, p. 320). Condit calls this practice of gradually developing a new understanding of an ethical issue a rhetorical "craft," and my suggestion here is that we might think of official apologies in a similar way: as a site of crafting public norms. In Condit's words, "to recognize morality as a collective craft is also to call ourselves to account for our participation in the ebb and flow of human morality […] the moral craft requires us to live the moment, through the legacies of the past, with just an eye to the fact that we are crafting the future as well" (p. 321). Condit's own example is how the American public understanding of the ethics of slavery slowly changed over the course of two hundred years as a result of public debate. Because of the effective rhetorical efforts of abolitionists, civil rights activists, politicians, and other public figures, views on slavery went from being seen as religiously sanctioned and thus morally right to the current understanding that slavery is morally wrong because it is based on racist assumptions and violates human rights. Condit's central point is that this revaluation has been a *public* process, and that the result is a change in *public morality.* In this way she shows how rhetorical practice, or in her own words, the rhetorical craft of public morality, is central to the development of the normative foundation of civic life at a practical level and eventually all the way to the legislative level. I see the same potential dynamic in official apologies that Condit finds in public debate. When the issue of an official apology emerges, it is usually accompanied by public debate – sometimes controversy – as well as political debate. In the process of deciding how a community will respond to the complaints of a group claiming to have been abused in the community's name, there will be deliberation about such things as the rights of individuals or minority groups, the rule of law, or similar principles which form the basis of civic life.

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Once a particular case is seen in light of such principles, the community has an opportunity to re-orient itself toward common *doxa* and perhaps find reason to change it. For example, this was the case when Stephen Harper, apologizing to native Canadians for the way they had been treated in residential schools, said, "Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country" (2008). Similarly, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized to the former migrant children also referred to as the "forgotten children"[8] detailing the failings of the government in a list of anaphoras beginning with "We look back in shame…" and ending with "we acknowledge today that the laws of our nation failed you," expressing the hope that "this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's history" and resolving that "such systematic abuse should never happen again" (2009).

By virtue of their potential to reflect and develop the values of a community at a given time, official apologies offer, I suggest, an opportunity for a community to renew itself. For the scholar, they represent a rich source for studying contemporary societal norms and value conflicts. I thus suggest that the most constructive approach to understanding official apologies rests on a combination of the epideictic perspective just discussed with a deliberative perspective, i.e., understanding official apologies as site of confirming or developing value politics. In official apologies and the processes that lead up to them we may study how elites and non-elites struggle over what it means to be a citizen or a member of a particular community. Here, we witness an interpretive struggle over the nature and meaning of citizenship. We see collective norms contested, negotiated, and redefined for strategic as well as constructive purposes. In this way they are one kind of instantiation of what may be called *rhetorical citizenship* (see Kock and Villadsen, 2012, pp. 1–10). This term conceptualizes what it means to be a citizen as in many respects a *discursive* phenomenon: how a particular community is discursively maintained, how it is affirmed or redefined in its communicative reactions to internal tensions, and who and how it allows participation of individuals or minority groups.

In this chapter I have tried to show that official apologies have a distinctively civic aspect. While a strict argument analysis based on the sketch suggested above is possible in this kind of rhetoric, I suggest the perspective of rhetorical citizenship as a more encompassing frame for understanding the role this form of discourse plays in public life. At the very basic level, the very act of speaking up

8. The "forgotten children" were poor or socially marginalized British children who were forcibly, and often under false pretenses, removed from their homes in UK and sent to Australia and other colonies, a practice that only ended in 1967 having affected the lives of approximately 130,000 children),

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and demanding attention is obviously an instance of enacting citizenship in a discursive manner. Significantly, official apologies provide examples of this practice being valorized for what it has done for the community. When Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern apologized to victims of child abuse, he recognized the bravery of the individuals who, by insisting on telling their stories and seeking justice, had done an "immense service" to the society by "challenging our collective complacency," making the community "confront" its own past and "learn its lessons" (1999). In a related speech given to Irish-born victims of child abuse now living in Britain the Irish spokesperson said that the Irish State owed them a "debt of gratitude … for their insistence and persistence in ensuring that this failure [of providing a loving protective environment for them as children] was brought out into the open" (2003). Similarly, when the Swedish Parliament's representative, Per Westerberg, spoke on behalf of all of Swedish society (including political decision makers, administrative officers, state and municipal authorities) before getting to the apology section of his speech, he thanked victims of neglect and abuse in Swedish orphanages for their courage to tell their stories so that the society could recognize its failure to protect them and be alert to avoid abuse of children in the future (2011).

In these speeches, we also find examples of the way official apologies can provide a frame for contemplation of values and principles that are formally sponsored by the state, but have been ignored or distorted to the detriment of civic justice and cohesion. Westerberg opened his speech with the words: "The Swedish Constitution states that public power must be enforced with respect for the equal worth of all people and for the freedom and dignity of each individual […] For us Swedes, solidarity with our fellow humans is self-evident and important." On this background, the acknowledgment of abuse in state-sponsored institutions later in the speech is clearly not merely a matter between the state and the victims, but a concern for all Swedes, and Westerberg repeatedly spoke of the failures of "the society" rather than narrowing the responsibility to particular individuals or offices.[9] The point for Westerberg was thus to underscore that the Swedish society as a civic collective had not lived up to its own standards and would, as a collective, be worse off were it not for the opportunity to recommit to its own values.

9. While these quotes might suggest that Westerberg is guilty of "democratization" of responsibility i.e., spreading it so thin than no one really is to blame, I believe that this reading would be wrong. Westerberg's role is to give voice to the apology part of the reconciliation process that included detailed accounts of instances of abuse, measures for economic compensation, and various offers of social support. The point for Westerberg is thus to underscore that the Swedish society as a civic collective has not lived up to its own standards.

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When Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg spoke to commemorate Holocaust, he not only acknowledged that while the Nazis initiated the process and were responsible for the murder of Jews, Gypsies, gay, handicapped, and other victim groups, it was Norwegian citizens who executed the arrests, drove the vans, and in other ways contributed to the horrible crime against humanity. In this way, he publicly acknowledged a communal responsibility weighing on the Norwegian people. His speech of apology reflected practical aspects of rhetorical citizenship as he called on Norwegians as a collective to take on the responsibility of arguing against antisemitic, racist and totalitarian forces on the basis of belief in humanity and equality (2012).

A final example of how official apologies can serve as a site for civic reinvigoration we can find in Kevin Rudd's aforementioned apology to migrant children, where in a characteristic Australian vernacular he celebrated their belief that "one day, Australia's sense of a fair-go would finally prevail. That our fair go would be extended to you" (2009). The same link between a deep-set Australian ethos of equal opportunity and the necessity to apologize was also a key point in Rudd' speech the year before when he apologized for Australia's treatment of children of Aboriginal background, the so-called stolen generations. Here, he explicitly linked the process of reconciliation with realization of the nation's ethos saying: "Reconciliation is in fact an expression of a core value of our nation – and that value is a fair go for all. There is a deep and abiding belief in the Australian community that, for the Stolen Generations, there was no fair go at all. And there is a pretty basic belief that says that it is time to put right this most outrageous of wrongs" (2008).

8. Conclusion

Public apologies take an increasingly prominent place in the media and at the political level. The argument in this paper has been that with clearer distinctions between apologia and apologies on the one hand, and the differences between interpersonal and public apologies on the other hand, we can begin to appreciate the role of official apologies as more than an odd ritualistic kind of speech act. When viewed from a perspective of rhetorical citizenship, we can highlight the kind of public moral argument the genre represents when it reconsiders a collective's actions toward a particular group as a breach of societal norms and values and endeavors to craft a new or renewed collective understanding of the social contract. Rather than staying within the confines of criticism based on speech act theory and its concern with forgiveness, I have pointed to epideictic and deliberative theory as well as contemporary research in political science in order to

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construct a framework combining theories of membership and rhetorical citizenship. This framework, I suggest, is suitable for analyzing and critiquing official apologies and their role in the debate and development of the norms and values informing particular communities, a role that makes this kind of discourse much more significant to society at large than often assumed.

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