

# Official or political apologies and improvement of intergroup relations: A neo-Durkheimian approach to official apologies as rituals

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## Abstract

*This article argues that institutional apologies are rituals that can be conceived from a neo-Durkheimian viewpoint as external social tools of collective emotion, which allow people to assume collective guilt and shame, increase agreement with reparatory behaviors, and reinforce social cohesion. The review of studies presented in this monograph shows that an apology reactivates and intensifies collective emotions, mainly of shame and guilt, above and beyond merely reminding people of past misdeeds, and increases support for reparation. Shame and sorrow fuel and support reparative tendencies. Finally, salience of past collective violence together with an apology improves social climate to some extent, enhances intergroup reconciliation by decreasing prejudice and improving intergroup contact, and helps to reconstruct in-group collective memory in a more critical way. Changes in collective emotions and representations of the past mediate the positive effects of apologies on reparation and social cohesion.*

**Keywords:** Public apologies, forgiveness, intergroup relations, rituals, Durkheim.

## Peticiones de perdón públicas o disculpas políticas y mejora de relaciones intergrupo: un marco de análisis neo-Durkheimiano a las disculpas oficiales en tanto rituales

### Resumen

*Este artículo argumenta que las disculpas o peticiones de perdón institucionales son rituales que se pueden conceptualizar desde un marco teórico neo-durkheimiano como instrumentos sociales externos de emociones colectivas, que le sirven de andamiaje o infraestructura a las personas para asumir la vergüenza y culpa colectiva, incrementan el acuerdo con conductas de reparación y refuerzan la cohesión social. La revisión de los estudios de este monográfico muestran que las disculpas institucionales reactivan e intensifican las emociones colectivas, principalmente de vergüenza y culpa, teniendo un efecto superior al recuerdo simple de los errores del pasado, y ayudan además a apoyar medidas de reparación. La vergüenza y culpa motivan y sirven de apoyo a las tendencias a la reparación. Finalmente, hace saliente o recordar las violencias colectivas pasadas, junto con las disculpas institucionales, mejoran en cierto grado el clima social y refuerzan la reconciliación intergrupar, disminuyendo el prejuicio y mejorando el contacto inter grupo, y ayudan a reconstruir de manera más autocrítica la memoria colectiva del endo grupo. Los cambios en las emociones colectivas y las representaciones del pasado median y explican los efectos positivos de las disculpas públicas en la cohesión social y las tendencias de reparación.*

**Palabras clave:** Disculpas publicas, perdón, relaciones intergrupo, rituales, Durkheim.

With the aim of reinforcing peace processes and reconciliation, coping with negative collective past events and constructing an integrative collective memory, it is important to understand how apology can function at an intergroup level. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to study the apology process at such a level. Official or intergroup apology goes beyond the recognition of responsibility and the adhesion to moral norms as individual phenomena. Morality, responsibility, guilt and shame become collective in character. We will try to analyze these collective processes.

### Apology as self-critical remembering as opposed to dominant positivistic collective memory

Recently, nations and institutions, reversing the classical self-enhancement tendency to “never apologize, never explain”, have offered many official apologies (Marrus, 2006). However “never apologize, never explain” is a preferred response when confronting an ugly past, at least among the dominant elites. Examples are numerous; for instance, the Russians refuse to acknowledge and apologize for the Katyn massacre and Red Army crimes of war, etc. (Baumesteir & Hastings, 1997; Nytagodien & Neal, 2004). Following Lind (2008), States and nations usually *glorify* past collective violence: they might admit that violent acts occurred in the past, but at the same time they might actually praise them as a just and necessary war, a cause for pride, like the US and British admission of casualties and lack of apology for the atrocities of bombings in Germany and Japan. They may also *justify* acts of collective violence, accepting that atrocities occurred but were necessary in the context – even if not glorious, as in the case of Japanese minimization of the brutality of the Imperial Army. Moreover, States and nations may *deny* that collective violence took place or that the State committed crimes, as in the case of the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide. They may also not deny but simply “*forget*” the past, with history books glossing over past crimes and commemorating neither victims nor perpetrators, as in the case of the French “amnesia” of massacres and tortures in Vietnam and Algeria. Admission of past collective violence may also be a cold neutral *acknowledgement* with no moral judgment: an example of neutral accounts are historical textbooks describing the atomic bombing of Japan and presenting a balanced vision of justification (bombing was necessary to end the war) and criticism (it was unnecessary, Japan was defeated and the bombing was merely an expression of military force to act as a warning to Stalin) (Lind, 2008; Páez & Liu, in press). Finally, admission of past violence by States and nations may be a form of admitting past misdeeds and communicating a self-critical negative moral judgment, which can be labelled *apology or self-critical remembering*. Forms of remembering are important because social representations of the past or ways of remembering it have consequences for the definition of heroes and villains or good and bad behaviors, and delineate acceptable policies and chart the future of nations, influencing the way they relate to other nations. Denial and glorification of past collective violence defines national collective behavior, usually reinforcing proactive attitudes in the case of high status and “winning” nations (Páez et al., 2008), but also inhibiting international reconciliation and fueling collective fear, anger and distrust (Lind, 2008). Even if apologies are not a necessary condition for reconciliation, as show the examples of the UK and USA that established friendly relations with Japan and Germany, and Germany with France, without apologizing for bombings and past violence, in some circumstances apologies appear to be a way of improving intergroup relationships.

### The Age of Apology

Currently we are living the so-called Age of Apology. Numerous groups admit and show remorse for past misdeeds, violence and negative collective behaviors. The use of

apology in response to past atrocities and violation of moral standards has become a universal norm. The politics of memory has changed from a collective memory of pride, based on past heroic golden ages, to a politics of the memory of regret. Due to the more critical view of the future and the erosion of past heroic narratives, the past that weighs the heaviest in many nations today is more the negative past, a self-reflexive collective memory that is focused more on learning a moral lesson from a shameful, undesired and regretted past (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Even if it is not a universal norm, Judt (2005) proposed that an apologetic view of the negative past is a norm in Europe: to become a member of the current European cultural region, a nation should apologize for its role in the Holocaust and past collective violence. For instance, several European countries have called for a Turkish acknowledgment of and apology for the Armenian genocide as a prerequisite for Turkey's membership of the EU.

As another example of a classical dogmatic institution that is reversing the "never explain, never apologize" doctrine, the Catholic Church is developing a theology of apology. During John Paul II's papacy, he apologized 94 times until 1997 for the past actions of Church authorities, the Inquisition, wars of religion, and wrongdoings to indigenous peoples, Muslims, Africans and the Jewish community (Accatoli, 1997, quoted in Marrus, 2006, p. 6).

Official apologies between nations have become important. Japan has regularly issued apologies since the nineties – to be precise, 36 since 1973, including admissions of misdeeds and remorse. For instance, Prime Minister Koizumo stated: "In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to people of many countries, particularly those of Asian nations. Japan squarely faces these facts of history with humility and feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology always engraved in the mind." (Marrus, 2006, p. 6). Other apologies include remorse and reparatory measures, like Murayama's 1995 apology to the sex slaves of the Imperial Army, accompanied by material compensation and the establishment of an educational foundation (Lind, 2008). In Europe, the French government has apologized for the role of Vichy in the Holocaust, and Belgium for their role in the Lumumba killing and for limitations in their intervention in Rwanda.

Apologies are also relevant within nations. The Nigerian and Chilean governments apologize to former political prisoners and victims. Apologies are sometimes included in restorative or transitional judicial processes (Collins, 2004). For instance, in 1991, Aylwin, the Chilean President, presented to the nation the Rettig or Truth Commission Report acknowledging 3000 persons "missing" or killed by the Chilean army and police, in a televised broadcast from the presidential palace in Santiago. Being the first democratic elected president after Pinochet's dictatorship, he insisted that the Chilean State should be responsible for the crimes of the past:

The agents of the State caused so much suffering and the responsible bodies of the State could not or did not know how to preclude or punish it, while the society failed to react properly. The State and society as a whole are responsible for action or omission... This is why I dare, in my position as President of the Republic, to assume the representation of the nation and, in its name, to beg forgiveness from the relatives of the victims. This is why I also solemnly ask the army and security forces who participated in the excesses committed to make gestures of acknowledgment of the pain they caused with the aim of contributing to the lessening of that pain. (Marrus, 2006, p. 14).

The Irish IRA and the Argentinian Montoneros, as well as some Argentinian and Chilean army generals, have apologized to their former targets and reject past violent actions against civilians as indefensible. Only in limited cases are apologies rejected, as was the case, for instance, of a local leader who did not accept Giscard's apology for French repression in 1947 in Madagascar. Usually, they are welcome, though they may also be criticized as limited (too few), delayed (too late), or insincere (Cairns, Tam, Hewstone and Niens, 2005; Staub, 2005). Apologies are also being included in

restorative justice programs and transitional justice procedures or peace processes (Collins, 2004). In all these cases, official apologies are conceived as a prerequisite to improve intergroup relationships, promote forgiveness and restore social cohesion. As Judt (2005) suggests, one objection is that it may only be a cultural belief that "apology is a necessary aspect of healing", unrelated to reality and only shared in some cultures.

### Apology and cultural beliefs

At the interpersonal level, an apology is an integrative device for maintaining in-group cohesion. Apologies in general try to restore the relationship with the offended party, to ask forgiveness and to maintain harmony and social cohesion. An apology offers the hope that social harmony can be restored and the deviant or perpetrator may regain a place in the society (Tavuchis, 1991). Certain differences related to culture and values have been pointed out, suggesting that apology is embedded in Christian and Western values but fits worse in the case of other traditions, like the Islamic and Asian cultures. However, studies in different parts of the world have discovered among lay people a similar script that includes apology as a phenomenon conducive to forgiveness (Azar & Mullet, 2001; 2002; Sandage & Williamson, 2005). Other differences refer to frequency: in cultures such as the hierarchical collectivist China, which emphasizes saving face or maintaining one's reputation, apologies are weighty acts that are rarely offered and accepted, because they erode social harmony. Cultures that differentiate strongly between the in- and out-group are reluctant to apologize to out-group members because the latter are considered unworthy of receiving an apology. The explanation for the reluctance of the Japanese to give complete apologies for war crimes in World War II is also a matter of cultural background (Stamato, 2008). However, a study in Lebanon, a supposed collectivist culture emphasizing in-group versus out-group behavioral differences, did not find that the effects of apology were different when coming from in-group or out-group offenders – at least not with a hypothetical scenario opposing Muslim and Druze, Catholic and Meronite Christians (Sandage & Williamson, 2005).

Finally, people strongly identified with the in-group, who hold strong hierarchical-collectivist, traditional and nationalist values, usually question apologies, regarding them as a sign of weakness and a lack of collective self-esteem; they refuse to apologize, emphasizing the glorification of the in-group past and present behaviors. There have been complaints in European, American and Asian countries coming from social and political groups objecting to proposed or realized apologies for their countries' past transgressions. Members of institutional or political in-groups who are strongly identified with the country and nationalist ideas tend to oppose apologies, because they deny the extent of crimes and wrongdoings, and consider that apologies for past wartime or political conflict would be a betrayal to in-group members that fought and died for "the good of the nation" (Cunningham, 2004). One study found that, when facing an apology for past collective violence associated with the in-group (i.e., facts about radical nationalist ETA's victims), those who highly identified themselves with the ethnic in-group (Bobowik, Bilbao & Momoitio, 2010, this issue) agreed more with defensive opinions related to past collective violence and reported lower agreement with reparations, although they did not show lower collective guilt or personal shame and sorrow, in comparison to low identifiers.

### General characteristics of apologies

Even though social identification level, culture type and values may influence the frequency, form, predisposition and some contents of apologies, when looking across different cultural contexts, apologies can be conceived as rituals of reconciliation (Marrus, 2006), which, by means of expiation, help to restore social relationships. With

minor variations, scholarly work on interpersonal (Regher & Gutheil, 2002), intergroup (Staub, 2005) and political (James, 2007; Marrus, 2006; Stamato, 2008) apologies as rituals of reconciliation include the following four features:

a) An acknowledgement that an injury or misdeed has occurred, clearly naming harm, wrongs and damage that were done, bringing issues into the open and promoting discussion of a taboo topic. What is important is the acknowledgement not only of the facts and suffering of the victims but also that the suffering was wrong, as in the case of the US President's official apology to Japanese Americans and Canadians for their internment during World War II and admitting no military necessity for such actions and that the internment was not a protective measure (Marrus, 2006). Apologies including recognition of wrongdoings have more positive effects than simply justifications ("It was a war") (Staub, 2005). There is some evidence that people have a better perception of the transgressor who apologizes (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006) and that the perpetrators' apology promotes the victims' forgiveness at the interpersonal level (Rusblut, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005).

b) An acceptance of responsibility for the mistake or wrong committed and a clear explanation of the role one or the in-group has played. For instance, when President Bush said he "was sorry for the humiliation suffered by Iraqi prisoners and by their families", for internments and torture in the Abu Ghraib prison in Bagdad, his acceptance of responsibility lack of implies a false apology (Marrus, 2006). However, Nadler & Liviatan (2006) found that acceptance of responsibility reinforces *the conciliatory effects of an apology* less than expressions of empathy for suffering. Probably, as they argue, the acceptance of responsibility may be more important for victims from low status and power groups (e.g. Palestinians) than for high status and power group (e.g. Israelis).

c) An expression of remorse, regret and humility, by verbal and non-verbal means, for the harm and for having committed the wrong. For instance, Chancellor Willy Brandt, kneeling in front of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943, expressed remorse and humility by means of non-verbal behavior (Brandt did not issue verbal statements). The expression of remorse at an interpersonal level (Staub, 2005) and empathy between groups, reinforce the reconciliatory effects of an apology (see above, Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). Expressing empathy (*Our (in)group do not have the monopoly of suffering...the other (out)group also experiences a lot of suffering*), recognizing the suffering of the other person or out-group, and overcoming a cold description of facts, facilitates the positive effect of an apology (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006).

d) A credible promise of non-repetition or commitment that the act will not occur again, and to change current negative behavior. Two studies at the interpersonal level confirm that perpetrators who are willing to "cancel" the negative consequences of their actions and communicate in a positive manner, make forgiveness more probable (Rusbult et al., 2005).

Current evidence suggests that perceived sincerity and the absence of justifications of misbehavior are factors related to a successful apology. Firstly, to be successful, an apology should be perceived as sincere, spontaneous, not coerced and not explicable in terms of such things as avoidance of punishment, social desirability, saving face, or because the apologizers might be rewarded (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Two studies found correlations between the sincerity of apologies and the perceived positive effects on reconciliation, which were an increase in perceived intergroup trust and social cohesion (Bobowik et al., 2010; Etxeberria, Páez, Valencia, Bilbao & Zubieta, in press). Secondly, a successful apology is not hypocritical, does not minimize the misdeeds, and does not try to excuse, justify, or glorify the negative behavior. However, studies show that excuses have an effect similar to apologies. Survivors of repressions in South Africa were exposed to different accounts of wrongdoings which were given by perpetrators: justifications (*We were at war*), excuses (*I had to follow orders*), and apologies (*I am sorry*). These explanations

were presented by perpetrators who testified in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, they were not in a real confrontation nor had the perpetrators direct responsibility for the survivors' suffering. Apologies had slightly higher effects than excuses, and both reduced anger and reinforced forgiveness more than justifications. Moreover, most survivors refused to forgive (Staub, 2005), congruently with other studies showing lower acceptance of apologies and high reluctance to forgive (Cairns et al., 2005).

Two other factors proposed - based more on argumentation than on evidence - as reinforcing the functional effect of apologies are concrete reparative actions and the implied absence of imposition to forgive (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). When apology includes the offer of some form of concrete or symbolic restitution and reparation, it is shown that issues are being discussed and solutions sought in a long-term process, and the apology is not imposed as a one-off and final action. An apology can only be a starting point because there is no easy way to redress the wrongs of the past and it requires a long-term process of dialogue and the construction of a future. The mere verbal reaffirmation of norms is not enough; actions and concrete behaviors are also needed to realize and implement these norms. In the case of transitional justice, for instance, institutional reforms, procedures of punitive justice, such as trials, and concrete reparative actions are required. In the case of Chile, Aylwin's apology included - in the mid-term - sanitary and educational support to victims, as well as monetary restitution, and - in the long term - the trial of perpetrators (Martín Beristain, Pérez, Rimé & Kanyangara, 2010, this issue).

A "good" apology asks implicitly for forgiveness but does not demand nor impose it openly, and puts the decision of forgiving freely in the hands of the other person or the out-group. An effective apology puts the offender in a position of vulnerability, and redresses partially the usually asymmetrical relationship in terms of power, status and resources between the perpetrator and victim groups. If the dominant and perpetrator group imposes forgiveness and definition of what is good and adaptive upon the offended group, then the apology fails because the asymmetrical and subordinate position of the offended group is maintained. The offender group should give the power to forgive or not to forgive to the offended group. This change in status and power relation is an important explanation of how some apologies help to restore dignity and self-respect (Lazare, 2004). In other words, the dynamics of apology help to reconstruct positive emotions and social beliefs in a just and benevolent social world, and potentially offer the victims a moral recognition of their personal worth and dignity.

### **Differences between Interpersonal and Intergroup Apologies**

Previous features characterize intergroup as well as interpersonal apologies. In the case of political, official or institutional apologies, usually representatives of wrongdoers and victims ("Many to Many") meet and exchange apologies and gestures, involving public ceremonies, documented declarations and sometimes laws and agreements (Tavuchis, 1991). These apologies for past injustice committed by the group's officials or members are given by a representative of a State or other organized group to the victims, or descendants of victims.

It is important to be aware that processes focusing on interpersonal apology, forgiveness and reconciliation, are different from intergroup and between-nation processes. Sometimes interpersonal apologies are embedded in transitional justice procedures, like the South African TRC, and are taken to be instances of intergroup apology. Apologies from specific perpetrators to specific victims in TRC audiences were supposed to be generalized and to promote intergroup reconciliation (Marrus, 2006). Some evidence and historical analysis suggests that the former is easier to obtain than the latter, and that the positive effects of personal apologies are not projected towards

intergroup relationships (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). Limited evidence suggests that group apologies are less effective than apologies performed by a single person. Individualized apologies (from a Japanese soldier offender to a sample of Australian students, supposed to be secondary victims of the Japanese Army's crimes of war in World War II), in contrast to group apologies, reinforce forgiveness for this target. Moreover, individual apologies are not translated into forgiveness for the wider offending group (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Research in social psychology has found a qualitative difference between interpersonal and intergroup relations: usually conflict is more extreme at an intergroup than at an interpersonal level. This principle of qualitative differences between interpersonal and intergroup processes is reproduced in the domain of apologies: in comparison with interpersonal apologies, intergroup or collective apologies are perceived as suspicious and insincere (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue; Valencia, Momoiito & Idoyaga, 2010, this issue) and implying low remorse (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008).

### **Specific characteristics of Official Apologies**

Four main characteristics differentiate official apologies from interpersonal ones: 1) official apologies are a performance carried out in a formal and stylized manner, 2) they constitute a public performance largely relayed by the mass media, 3) respected high-status representatives are involved in such an apology, and 4) they embody a process that requires some consensual support of the in-group population, as well as an absence of defensive reactions, questioning apology, denying or glorifying accounts of the past negative events (Tavuchis, 1991). These four characteristics will be detailed below.

Thus, the first important aspect of official genuine apologies is the fact that the State or a representative undertakes a public ceremony and the apology is performed in a scenario with high symbolic value, in an official form, recorded in written documents, in front of representatives of the harmed out-group, and directed towards a large audience. For the apology to work, it must be performed symbolically given the fact that it is an expiation ritual. As in the case of all rituals, formality and stylized activities should be included. Apologies should also use a special space and time, distinct and special personal texts, specific codes of communication to heighten the formality of the act, verbal and non verbal expression that evokes the goals of the speech act and refers to norms or moral standards (Bell, 1997). Who, how and under what conditions the apology is to be presented should be negotiated between representatives of perpetrators and victims. For example, the President Clinton's apology for the USA's and the UN's failures to intervene in the Rwandan genocide was an instance of failed apology because of the absence of ritual forms: he spoke during a quick visit to Kigali, spent less than two hours there, never left the airport, and the engines of the President's airplane were never turned off. This informal, quick and too-casual apology didn't work (Stamato, 2008). A study done in Africa and Asia on the expectations of people who underwent severe past experiences of collective violence and are involved in current processes of peace confirms that people agree on the importance of asking for forgiveness in public and by means of ritual forms. Apology and the process of asking for intergroup forgiveness was conceived in essence as a public process. Participants agreed that the process should take place inside places which are symbolic for the group that is requested to forgive (ideally, the governmental palace) or for the group that request forgiveness (e.g., a sacred place), as well as that the language used should be a language with a broad international diffusion instead of the language of the group which is requested to forgive (Mullet, Pinto, Nann, Kandiangandu & Neto, 2009). As the authors conclude, these shared beliefs are consistent with Tavuchis' conception of intergroup apologies. They must be "quintessentially public" and not the private opinions of the deputies; they are a matter for public record. Intergroup apologies

should be “addressed to a wider audience as much as to the offended party” so that the forgiveness process also “speaks to interested third parties.” (Tavuchis, 1991, p. 101).

Secondly, a “genuine” official apology as a public ceremony involves not only the direct audience but is usually communicated to the population by mass media such as radio, TV and the press. In modern societies mediated participation in rituals via the mass media seems to be the most important way to evoke a specific emotional climate and build collective memory. Mass media exposure was found to be the main process reinforcing emotions and cognitions induced by ceremonies and rituals in three studies (Páez, Bellelli, & Rimé, 2009). This is why wide coverage by the mass media and display of the apology in printed form is another important aspect of a successful apology. For instance, 0.7% of a representative South African sample participated by giving testimony to the TRC, 13% have attended a TRC event, while it was seen on television or heard on the radio by around 40% of the population. Even if apologies were limited in quantity and quality in the TRC (Staub, 2005), they formed a part of this process. Confirming that exposure to rituals reinforces emotions and intergroup reconciliation, media exposure to the TRC predicts in a regression higher emotional activation (higher distress but not anger) and higher agreement with forgiveness (Stein et al., 2008).

What is more, an official apology should be expressed by respected and representative figures, in front of or directed towards a similar representation of the out-group. Formal apologies recognize that the authority of the State and institutions was used inappropriately and that institutional violence was used against a minority, a political faction or another national group (see Aylwin's declaration). For instance, Mandela used his high status as a black leader to acknowledge and apologize for atrocities allegedly committed by the African National Congress against suspected enemies (Gibson, 2004). Brandt's apology was successful because he was German Chancellor and at the same time an old social-democrat leftist, with a background of active anti-Nazi militancy, including illegal and exiled activities against the German regime. At the opposite extreme, an instance of failed apology is Clinton's expression of his personal regret for the role that the USA played in slavery because the expression of regret did not include the official role. The President's clear avoidance of official apology and the fact that the audience was a gathering of school children in Uganda explains the limited reception of this apology (Nytagoden & Neal, 2004).

Finally, an official apology should be carried out by a respected and representative figure with public support of at least an important proportion of the in-group. A “genuine” official apology should be the result of a general process that ensures that not only the authorities, but also the population, support the apology and there is not a considerable proportion promoting the denial or glorification of past wrongdoings. Studies on lay expectations in different countries confirm that people expect that apologies and asking intergroup forgiveness should be a democratic process in which the support of the group can be assumed (Mullet et al., 2009). Two studies found that perceived support of the Catholic Church and the Basque Parliament reinforces slightly the positive impact of apologies. However, sincerity was a more important correlate of the apology's effectiveness (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue; Valencia et al., 2010, this issue).

An unsuccessful apology can produce a backlash of in-group criticism which can erode the positive impact of official acknowledgement and promote not intergroup trust but rather distrust. An example illustrating the fact that apologies are likely to provoke counter-reactions are Japanese apologies which have been undermined because sections of the government – right-wing and conservative factions - did not accept the Prime Minister or Parliament's statements of regret (Lind, 2008). Contemporary conservative efforts to glorify Imperial Japan's wartime record are marginal but have an important negative impact on intergroup reconciliation with China and Korea. Strong

debates about the apology, minimization of culpability in the case of sex slaves, as well as statements of denial, are major factors fuelling Koreans' distrust regarding official Japanese apologies (Lu, 2008).

### **Explanatory processes of apologies**

Different explanatory processes have been applied to the positive effects of apologies. First, some authors propose restoration of face as an explanation of apology (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Apology helps to restore both victim's and perpetrator's self-esteem by complementary but different factors: on receiving an apology and having the possibility of accepting or rejecting it, the victim experiences an increased perception of control, efficacy and self-esteem. Showing a pro-social attitude and behavior, the perpetrators accept and cancel negative past facets of the self, and also increase their own self-esteem (Nadler & Leviatian, 2006). Apology, the simultaneous humility of the perpetrator and the victim's improvement in status, as well as the "gift" of remorse, excuses and regrets from offender to offended, restore equity in victim-offender relationships (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008).

Another explanation proposes that apology promotes empathy for the offender (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). In the case of intergroup apologies, usually both sides are in part victims and in part offenders. Some data supports the view that intergroup apologies promote mutual empathy. Expression of remorse and validation of the victim's suffering facilitate intergroup empathy that is positively related to forgiveness and reconciliation. Expression of remorse and validation of out-group suffering also helps groups in conflict to avoid focusing on in-group suffering and to overcome selective victimization, competitive victimhood, or the subjective sense of having suffered more than the out-group, which are all obstacles to reconciliation and forgiveness (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi & Lewis, 2008). Competitive victimhood, the usual effect of intense and violent long-term conflicts, was associated negatively with forgiveness, and with reconciliation, in Chile and Northern Ireland (Noor et al., 2008). However, the positive perception of the Spanish Catholic Church's apology correlates only slightly negatively with perception of competitive victimhood, and the latter was not associated with increased intergroup empathy, agreement with reparation, inter-group trust, forgiveness and reconciliation (Etxeberria et al., in press).

Changing attributions of the offender's behavior is another explanation of the positive effects of apologies. By explaining past misdeed as a limited and regretted behavior, apologies alter attributions. Acceptance of apologies leads to the perception of past offenses as having been caused by external and unstable factors, more than resulting from any essential "national character" of the offender group. Apology also reduces perception of the likelihood of future offenses, and globally this changes stereotypes and the perception of offenders (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). At the intergroup level, the expression of remorse, commitment to change aggressive behaviors, concrete reparations and potential positive exchange (e.g., acceptance of excuses and regrets) can change intergroup perceptions, reinforcing intergroup trust, which is positively related to forgiveness and is an important factor in reconciliation (Noor, et al., 2008). In other words, actual and symbolic changes implicitly present in apologies help to modify negative intergroup stereotypes and increase basic intergroup trust. Increasing intergroup trust, usually by stopping collective violence and sending positive signals, is a first stage previous to successful apologies in the case of protracted conflicts, because only people with some level of intergroup trust react positively to apologies (Nadler & Liviastian, 2006). Confirming that perceptions of these constructs are associated, the positive perception of the Spanish Catholic Church's apology correlates with a perception of increased intergroup empathy, agreement with reparation, inter-group trust, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Etxeberria et al., in press).

It has also been suggested that apology helps to overcome cognitive dissonance, the tendency to defend collective self-esteem, and the tendency to perceive the world as just (Lastrego, 2009). When exposed to past collective group misdeeds, and when nothing can be done to repair what has happened, people probably tend to believe that the victims deserved their fate, to devalue them and to justify in-group actions. Similarly, being aware of the association between a good object (the in-group) and a bad action related to the in-group induces a dissonance if no reason explains past predatory in-group behavior. To reduce the dissonance (because the past cannot be modified), subjects will probably minimize violence, ignore and rationalize it. The same tendencies are expected as mechanisms of defense of collective self-esteem. In fact, when reminded of or exposed to past in-group misdeeds, instead of feeling collective guilt, highly-identified members justify, minimize or glorify past collective violence behaviors (Yzerbit & Demoulin, in press). In contrast, an apology shows that at least some symbolic action can be done and helps people to overcome a tendency to believe in a just world. Apologies also add a congruent positive element, helping to decrease dissonance. Finally, apology can be a source of collective pride, of "moral excellence", that helps even highly identified subjects to admit past misdeeds, overcoming the need to reject or rationalize them to maintain collective self-esteem. All these explanations are partially correct, but are essentially intrapersonal explanations. We will propose a socio-cultural or a collective-level explanation of the positive effects of apology anchored in Durkheim's classic approach to rituals. An important point which brings this approach into relief is that official apologies do not usually have an effect on direct victims and perpetrators. On the one hand, victims refuse to accept apologies considered to be limited and insincere, or to forgive perpetrators because it means betraying victims and in-group values; on the other, perpetrators deny the necessity to apologize, as well as justifying and glorifying past violence. For instance, while exposure to the South African TRC increases forgiveness, direct participation decreases it (Stein et al., 2008). As Durkheim suggests, expiation rituals such as apologies have important social effects, but not necessarily positive direct effects for involved participants. This means that group and intergroup antecedents and effects are fundamental in explaining how official apologies function.

### Official Apology as a moral ritual

Tavuchis (1991) conceives apology as a secular form of an expiation ritual, which includes the roles of representatives of wrongdoers and representatives of the victims or their descendants, a framework, and an authoritative audience. This author posits that official or political apology is an intergroup form of ritual whose function is to reintegrate a norm-violating social, ethnic, national or political group into the international society whose norms have been violated. The goal of the apology is for the group, institution or nation to regain membership of the national or international community by admitting that its past behavior cannot be glorified, justified, or ignored and is indefensible and may deserve social exclusion. The group that apologizes is one that admits to having violated a norm which it itself acknowledges (Tavuchis, 1991). In a clear statement of this neo-Durkheimian conception of apologies as rituals that reaffirm norms and values, Tavuchis (1991) writes:

Genuine apologies...may be taken as the symbolic foci of secular remedial rituals that serve to recall and reaffirm allegiance to codes of behavior and belief whose integrity has been tested and challenged by transgression... An apology thus speaks to an act that cannot be undone but cannot go unnoticed without compromising the current and future relationships of the parties, the legitimacy of the violated rule, and the wider social web in which the participants are enmeshed (p. 13).

Of course, apologies have limitations and in some cases they are just "cheap talk" or an easy way for dominant and perpetrator groups to present themselves

positively and to do nothing to redress past misdeeds and current asymmetrical and exploitative relationships (Barkan, 2000). “Phoney” apologies, with no actual effects, may be positive only for perpetrators. One survivor of collective violence expressed this idea by saying that apologies were invented by perpetrators to make them feel better, save face and avoid accountability and reparative actions (Rehger & Gutheil, 2002). However, even if all criticism is partially real, and if instrumental goals are achieved to a limited extent, official rituals of apology can have positive symbolic effects. Of course, rituals of expiation can fail just like others and, instead of inducing the expected emotions and changes in social beliefs, may provoke reactance and opposite reactions – anger instead of shame, resentment instead of forgiveness, and so on (Collins, 2004).

Like all rituals, an apology is an external cultural device or tool that allows persons and groups involved to focus on common topics and feel shared emotions, that increases social sharing and bonding, and that reinforces symbols and social representations, facilitating the change and improvement of affects and cognitions. A ritual is a transformer of collective emotions and beliefs, which can turn negative emotions and beliefs into positive ones (Collins, 2004; Páez, Rimé & Basabe, 2004). A successful apology ritual enables people involved to acknowledge negative emotions and behaviors, to overcome them by simultaneously feeling positive emotions and provoking positive social representations, reinforcing shared norms and increasing social cohesion or improving intergroup relations. Some authors (Tavuchis, 1991), and limited evidence (Philpot & Horsney, 2008), suggest that emotions are not relevant in official or intergroup apologies. However, a neo-Durkheimian approach emphasizes the role of personal and collective emotions. Confirming this idea, a large study on African and Asian subjects living through a transitional justice process after recent events of extreme collective violence (e.g., East Timor) found that asking for intergroup forgiveness was conceived of as implying the expression of emotions from the people who ask for forgiveness (e.g., contrition, remorse, and repentance). It was also conceived as implying concrete behaviors attesting to the sincerity of the demand (e.g., a gift of money, punishment of the persons responsible for the atrocities). The importance of emotions is consistent with what has been observed in successful and prototypical official apologies, such as Chancellor Brandt kneeling before the city’s memorial to the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943; he behaviorally, if not verbally, expressed deep emotions (Mullet et al., in press) and observers also reported experiencing feelings of shame and pride (Marrus, 2006).

Apologies could be conceived of as a symbolic meeting and confrontation of criminals and victims – more exactly of secondary or vicarious perpetrators and affected persons. Both groups focus their attention on past crimes, the perpetrators’ wrongdoings and the victims’ injuries and suffering. An apology as a ritual reactivates negative emotions of shame, anger, and sadness for secondary victims, along with emotions of shame, embarrassment, guilt and distress for secondary perpetrators. Apologies usually provoke strong emotions because they are related to conflictive issues, to “battles over memory and history” (Cunningham, 2004). Stories of triumphs and defeats that involve crimes of war, or a large number of injured and dead, as well as exploitation and injustice, provoke powerful emotions of humiliation, shame, guilt, anger and sadness, repentance and remorse (Lu, 2008). Salience of past collective violence and of an official apology induces increased perception of a collective negative emotion in comparison to a control group in which people are only reminded of the facts of collective violence (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue; Lastrego, 2009), as well as increased reports of collective guilt in one case (Valencia et al., 2010, this issue).

By means of the perpetrator’s expression of regret and commitment to reparation and the victim’s expression of some level of forgiveness and reconciliation, the feelings

of shame, anger and sadness are shared and transformed. Apologies involve an exchange of emotions and changes in power, status and relationships. As Lazare points out:

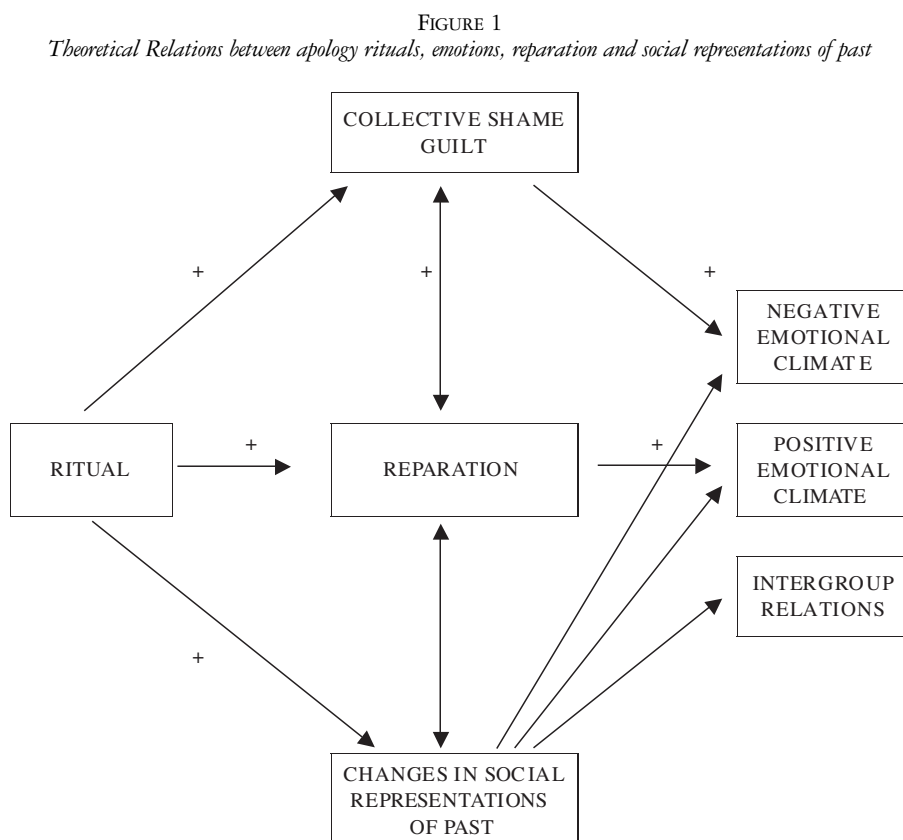
...what makes an apology work is the exchange of shame and power between the offender and the offended. By apologizing, you take the shame of your offense and redirect it to yourself. You admit to hurting or diminishing someone, and in effect say that you are the one who is diminished – I'm the one who was wrong...In acknowledging your shame you give the offended the power to forgive" (Lazare, 2004, p. 52).

The offender group is ashamed and symbolically punished, the victim group is revalorized and symbolically rewarded, and both groups can feel pride and a positive emotional climate. Apologies validate the claims of victims, who feel that suffering long ignored or denied has at last been recognized. Apologies allow the perpetrators to save face and thus permit the acknowledgment of wrongdoings that might otherwise be glorified, ignored or justified, facilitating the integration of negative aspects. For instance, Germans belonging to the post-war generation refer to Brandt's apology as one of the few times they were proud of German representatives, and – by extension – to overcoming the shame of being German and feeling themselves proud to be German (Marrus, 2006). The salience of past collective violence and of an official apology induces increased shame and sorrow in comparison to a control group in which people are (*see above*) only reminded of the facts of collective violence (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue; Lastrego, 2009). These results confirm that apology, as an external affordance, reinforces negative moral emotions – more than merely serving as a reminder of past collective misdeeds.

A successful apology reinforces the attachment to a shared basic norm (not to kill others, to repair wrongs) and symbolically reintegrates both groups in a community (Collins, 2004). In one of the most successful apologies, the one expressed by Chancellor Brandt, the apology for German war crimes was not only a gesture to improve relations with Poland, but also a reconfirmation of Germans' collective engagement to norms of respect for human rights that were violated in the Hitler period. In the abovementioned experimental study (Lastrego, 2009), it was additionally found that the apology-and-salience-of-suffering-condition group also reported higher agreement with reparations in comparison to the control group. Salience of past collective violence (ETA's murders) and of an official apology (the Basque Parliament and Government official apology to victims for lack of solidarity, which includes a law of reparatory actions) improves agreement with material and symbolic reparation to victims when contrasted with the control group in which people are reminded of facts of collective violence. Additionally, the feeling of shame and sorrow correlates with and plays a mediating role with respect to reparation, confirming that emotions fuel restorative behavior (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue; Valencia et al., 2010, this issue).

What is more, and confirming that an official apology reinforces social cohesion, Valencia et al. (this issue) found that perception of a positive emotional climate, including the perception of solidarity and social trust, was higher in the condition including the Law of Memory and remembering collective violence related to the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, Bobowik et al. (2010, this issue) found that in the "Basque Government and Parliament apology" condition, perception of a positive climate was better for participants with low identification with Basques than among low identifiers in the control condition, while the opposite was true for high identifiers, suggesting that apologies had a cost mainly for perpetrators. Lastrego (2009) found that an official apology (Belgium's Prime Minister apologizing for past colonial misdeeds in the former Belgian Congo), together with the salience of out-group suffering (i.e., Congolese people's current suffering), increases the perception of a positive emotional climate, which was higher in the "salience of suffering and apology"

condition ( $M = 3.17$ ) than in the control condition (only remembering past misdeeds  $M = 2.79$ ), confirming that apologies have positive effects on perceived social cohesion. However, two experimental studies did not confirm that the salience of apology reinforces a positive emotional climate or positive social beliefs, and in one study it even caused a decrease in beliefs in a benevolent world (Bobowik et al., 2010, this issue). It is probable that one-off, limited experimental manipulation of salience of an apology did not have enough power to restore general social belief. Lastrego and Licata's (2010, this issue) data also support positive effects of apology on intergroup perception and intention of behavior, at least among vicarious perpetrators. Salience of an official apology for past colonial misdeeds decreased Belgian participants' prejudice towards "the Congolese", whereas it increased the tendency towards intergroup contact. This study also suggests that out-group current suffering is enough to improve intergroup perception and a tendency towards intergroup contact. Lastrego & Licata (2010, this issue) confirm that an apology involves constructing a social representation of the past with which both victims and perpetrators can agree, because Belgians who were exposed to the apology, in contrast to a control group, reported a less positivistic view of the colonial past. Agreement with a less positivistic view of the past mediates the effect of apology on agreement with reparation and positive intergroup attitudes. This result suggests that apologies help to construct a more integrative and self-critical social representation of the past, a narrative in which victims' experience matters, their accounts, feelings and suffering are respected, and in which they are entitled to dignity – a common narrative of what has happened, a narrative that both parties can live with (Páez & Liu, in press). Figure 1 represents the model of apologies as a moral ritual in a graphic form:



## Conclusions

Concluding, apology has a positive but limited effect, and an absence of self-justification improves its impact on perception and forgiveness. Acceptance of responsibility improves the slightly positive impact of apology. The acceptance of responsibility is probably more relevant for low status and “weaker” groups of victims than for high status and power victims. Expressing remorse and emotional empathy improve the positive impact of apology. Offers of specific reparations also reinforce the impact of apologies, as well as perception of sincerity, probably associated with former behaviors. Finally, mere verbal reaffirmation of norms is not enough, and actions and concrete behaviors are needed to realize and implement these norms.

Apology should not impose forgiveness, because the free will of the victims is an important aspect, facilitating improvements in self-esteem and perceived control.

What is more, interpersonal apology does not generalize to intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation. Individualized apology could have more positive impact than group apologies, but did not generalize to the wider group of the apologizer. Limited evidence suggests that official apologies are perceived negatively with low sincerity and higher limitations. An official successful apology probably needs to be performed “ritually”, not casually, in a formal and stylized manner, respecting the values and norms of groups. This ritual public performance needs to be largely relayed by mass media. Some data confirm that exposure to transitional justice rituals, which include partial perpetrators’ apologies and respected authorities’ validation of victims’ suffering, reinforces reconciliation. Respected representatives with high status should be involved in the apology.

Absence or control of defensive reactions which call the apology into question, are a necessary condition for a successful apology, as historical evidence suggests. The perceived perpetrator group’s support for apology reinforces positive effects on reconciliation and social cohesion – but support has lower relevance than sincerity, probably because victims accept apologies performed by a fraction of the out-group.

Some data partially confirm that apologies act as rituals of moral repentance, including focus on a negative event, reactivation of negative emotions related to past events and activation of emotions of shame, sorrow and guilt by current expression of regret. This sharing of emotions helps to improve positive emotions and social representations. An apology reactivates and intensifies personal and collective emotions, mainly of shame, sorrow and guilt – it has an emotional cost – above and beyond merely reminding people of past misdeeds. However, at the same time, an official apology increases support for the norm of reparation or agreement with material and symbolic reparation. Shame and sorrow fuels and supports reparative tendencies. Finally, salience of past collective violence and misdeeds together with an apology probably improves the social climate to some extent, enhances intergroup reconciliation by decreasing prejudice and improving intergroup contact, and helps to reconstruct in-group collective memory in a more critical view – which can support a more integrative narrative.

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