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A haunted past: requesting forgiveness for wrongdoing in International Relations

NAVA LÖWENHEIM*

Abstract. This article examines why states ask for forgiveness from other states or peoples that they have harmed. Asking for forgiveness has significant political, legal, and moral implications. But beyond these, the subject concerns how states confront their history and their collective responsibility for wrongdoing. My focus on the reasons states have for asking forgiveness could also improve our understanding of conflict resolution. The article introduces an innovative typology of requests for forgiveness by presenting important conceptual distinctions in the terminology currently employed in the field. Apologies, regrets, and expressions of sorrow are conceptualised as distinct avenues of asking forgiveness with varying degrees of significance and meaningfulness. I assert that the type of request for forgiveness is influenced by the degree of severity attributed to a wrongdoing and by the extent to which a state perceives its image as threatened by its wrongful act. The article analyses the important 1951 statement of West Germany's Chancellor Adenauer regarding the Jewish Holocaust as an example of a type of request for forgiveness.

Introduction

The article addresses the unique phenomenon of requests for forgiveness in international politics. It analyses states' reasons for requesting forgiveness from other states or peoples they have seriously harmed. It focuses on the wrongdoer.

Internationally, it has become increasingly accepted to demand that states apologise for their wrongdoings. Demands such as these have created a tendency in the international arena to issue political apologies. Since the last decade of the twentieth century a variety of apologies and expressions of regret have been issued by leaders and governments (for example, Tony Blair's expression of regret in 1997 for the Irish Potato Famine; Japan's apologies for its aggression in the Second World War; Germany's Chancellor Schroeder's request for forgiveness from the Russian people for the horrors of WWII (in May 2005); and in 2000, the Belgium prime minister requested forgiveness for his country's part in failing to prevent the Rwanda genocide). Religious organisations have also expressed repentance (the

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Catholic Church issued numerous apologies before 2000) from peoples wronged in the past. This period in fact earned the name 'age of apologies'.[1]

Requesting forgiveness carries significant political, legal, and moral implications (such as, the obligation to compensate an injured party), and this is important enough to warrant studying why states request forgiveness for grave wrongs committed in the past. However, beyond that, studying forgiveness in International Relations is strongly linked to how states remember and construct their history and how they perceive their responsibility for their wrongdoings. Apologies enable international actors to confront past wrongdoings[2] and their implications. Moreover, states identify transgressions and develop or reinforce norms that international society considers important through apologies, expressions of regret, and other forms (utterances as well as actions) of requests for forgiveness (see below). One could also argue that the study of forgiveness is important in IR because the 'age of apologies' implies the emergence of a new international norm. States' requests for forgiveness are important for conflict resolution[3] and understanding why they seek forgiveness may offer insights into this important area. Indeed, the increasing manifestation of political apologies in the international arena reflects the importance ascribed by international actors to apology as a tool that can help to resolve complex and minor conflicts.

Therefore, even though the phenomenon of public requests for forgiveness between international actors is still relatively new both on the ground and in the Political Science and International Relations literature, its relevance to these fields is evident.[4] The value of researching requests for forgiveness (both inter-personal and public requests) has been acknowledged by other disciplines as well.[5]

[1] Roy. L. Brooks, 'The Age of Apology', in Roy L. Brooks (ed.), *When Sorry isn't Enough* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 3–11.

[2] Mark. R. Amstutz, *The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC, 2005), p. vii.

[3] Peter. E. Digeser, *Political Forgiveness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 69–70; Raymond Cohen, 'Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations', in Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (ed.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 178; Yehudit Auerbach, 'The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation', in Bar-Siman-Tov (ed.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, p. 156.

[4] As shown by recent studies: E. Barkan and A. Karn (eds), *Taking Wrongs seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Marguerite La Caze, 'The Asymmetry between Apology and Forgiveness', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 5 (2006), pp. 447–68; Michael R. Marrus, 'Official Apologies and the Quest for Historical Justice', *Journal of Human Rights*, 6:1 (2007), pp. 75–105; Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud and Niklaus Steiner (eds), *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Michael Cunningham, '"It Wasn't Us and We Didn't Benefit": The Discourse of Opposition to an Apology by Britain for its Role in the Slave Trade', *The Political Quarterly* 79:2 (2008), pp. 252–59; Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[5] For example: in sociology, Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); in philosophy: Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); in law: D. Shelton, 'The World of Atonement: Reparations for Historical Injustices', *Netherlands International Law Review* (2003), pp. 289–325; in psychology: M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament and C. E. Thoresen (eds), *Forgiveness. Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2000); A. Lazare, *On Apology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and in discourse studies: R. T Lakoff, 'Nine Ways of Looking at Apologies: The Necessity for Interdisciplinary Theory and Method in Discourse Analysis', in D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen and H. E. Hemilton (eds), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 199–214.

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This article argues that there are different reasons for a former wrongdoer to ask for forgiveness and that these lead to different types of requests. Thus, a wrongdoer will use a variety of language formulations and actions when requesting forgiveness. The article sets out an innovative typology of requests for forgiveness and presents important conceptual distinctions in the terminology currently employed by researchers. Apologies, regrets, and expressions of sorrow are conceptualised as different avenues for requesting forgiveness having differing levels of significance and meaningfulness. The main theoretical argument suggests that the type of request for forgiveness will be affected by two explanatory variables: the degree of severity which a wrongdoer state attributes to its wrongdoing and the extent to which it perceives that its image is threatened by the wrongdoing. Both variables involve external utilitarian and internal normative considerations which are expressed through the 'three degrees of internalization' discussed by Alexander Wendt:[6] Coercion, Self-interest, and Legitimacy. These three degrees are actually three explanations of the wrongdoer state's behaviour.[7] In this article, the three degrees of internalisation serve as the inner mechanism of each explanatory variable. They do not simply reflect the various stages of the long process in which a wrongdoer state confronts its problematic past but also enable us to understand, explain, and analyse these stages. In addition, the three degrees of internalisation are integral to explaining why states issue different types of request for forgiveness. The types of request for forgiveness show where the wrongdoer state is located with regard to its process of coming to terms with its wrong.

The model introduced below demonstrates the contribution of ideas and concepts to processes of change, perceptions of reality,[8] and collective identity. In this sense, this model can be ascribed to the constructivist approach, which has earned a respectable place in IR literature.[9]

In the following sections of this article, which provide the study's conceptual frame, I will elaborate on the investigated phenomenon and its explanation. Using this theoretical framework, the article will examine the September 1951 statement by the West German chancellor, Adenauer, regarding the Holocaust which is considered here as the first request for forgiveness ever issued by West Germany. Germany was a pioneer of the phenomenon of state apologies in the twentieth century. Adenauer's declaration was the first step in a long process, which continues today, of addressing the Nazi past and its implications for German identity. This process has produced other meaningful requests (the most famous was Chancellor Brandt's 'knee fall' in front of the Warsaw memorial in 1970) and

[6] Wendt Alexander, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Hurd presented a similar idea through three mechanisms of social control that explain why an actor might obey a rule: Ian Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', *International Organization*, 53: 2 (1999), pp. 379–408.

[7] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 43.

[8] Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism: The Democratic-Peace Thesis and the Politics of Democratization', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:4 (2006), p. 567.

[9] See, for example, Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International* Politics, 3:3 (1997), pp. 319–63; Jeffery Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics*, 50:2 (1998), pp. 324–48; M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 887–917; Thomas Risse, '"Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization*, 54:1 (2000), pp. 1–39.

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what made Germany a paradigmatic case for the phenomenon this article explores. The declaration also led to reparation negotiations between West Germany and Israel, enabling the process of relation building between Germany and Israel to take place.

Political request for forgiveness

To facilitate the usage of a concept normally associated with interpersonal relations in the context of collectives, this article has borrowed the term 'political forgiveness' from Peter Digeser.[10] Digeser defined political forgiveness as releasing the debtor from debts of the past. The term 'political forgiveness' allows us to relate to a collective as a single unit. Political forgiveness ensures that past claims do not continue to pursue the future: it is a path to political reconciliation, it offers a fresh start. But it is not about erasing the resentment of the victim for whom it cannot achieve full justice either. When we use the word 'political' in the context of forgiveness we do not mean the philosophical ideal of a pure and uncompromising forgiveness.[11] Forgiveness in the political realm is neither pure, sublime, or neutral. It has a clear political meaning. Thus, accepting the notion of 'political forgiveness' (in other words that a state can be forgiven politically) allows the application to the field of International Relations a notion which originally belonged to the realm of interpersonal relations.

In addition, because the state is a corporate actor that transcends time and government change we can ascribe responsibility for the past to it. The wrong was preformed in the name of the state and therefore it is possible to ask for forgiveness in the name of the state at a later date and for other actors to expect it to comply. The citizens of a state can not only inherit a legacy of bravery but also of moral wrongs and insults, sins, and obligations. Thus, future generations can be held accountable for earlier wrongs committed by their state. The apology for that wrong is an official apology made publicly and formally in the name of a nation.[12]

Requesting forgiveness is always difficult, especially so in the field of International Relations. It is therefore essential when analysing political requests for forgiveness to examine the type of request made, because one thing is certain – the state was meticulous about its choice.

[10] Digeser, *Political Forgiveness*. For a detailed explanation of the distinct characteristics of official and interpersonal apologies see: Tavuchis, Mea Culpa, pp. 100–101; Trudy Govier and W. Verwoerd, 'The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 33:1 (2002), p. 76. Donald. W. Jr. Shriver, 'Is There Forgiveness in Politics? Germany, Vietnam, and America', in Enright, R. D. and J. North (eds), *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 133–4.

[11] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

[12] Janna Thompson, 'Apology, Justice, and Respect: A Critical Defence of Political Apology', in Mark Gibney et al. (eds), *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 31.

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Different avenues for requesting forgiveness

The professional literature often obscures or fails to fully explore the differences between forgiveness, asking for forgiveness, apology, and expressions of sorrow and their functions. However, it is necessary to understand these distinctions as they reflect a wrongdoer's reasons for requesting forgiveness and can influence the resolution of conflict arising from a wrongdoing.

This section explores these distinctions as they provide us with tools that can help classify actions and concepts which a political actor might use with reference to a problematic past and which reflect the actor's perceptions of that past. Moreover, the expression or action chosen teaches us about the wrongdoer's perception of its responsibility for the wrong (and thus also its identity perception). Since there are different reasons for requesting forgiveness reflecting degrees of perception of responsibility, it is necessary to refer here, in respect to the examined phenomenon, not only to a request for forgiveness but also to its *type or degree*.

A wrongdoer state has several avenues of asking for forgiveness. Its request could be verbal – a speech-act[13] – or it could be an action (reparations). The speech-act of asking for forgiveness comes in several forms, from direct and obvious to indirect and oblique.[14] When referring to the speech-act, it is essential to distinguish between 'sorry', 'apologise', and 'we ask for your forgiveness'. The first two utterances are common in everyday language, whereas the last is more formal. Choosing one utterance over another in the international arena is neither incidental nor neutral. The greater the illocutionary power (intention behind the words) of an utterance, the greater its influence will be on the victim-perpetrator relationship.

The different types of the examined phenomenon (the type/degree of the request for forgiveness) and their different levels of worth are situated along a continuum of their relative importance. This is the continuum of possibilities of asking for forgiveness. A wrongdoer's choices regarding asking for forgiveness range from refusing to ask for forgiveness (very close to that pole lies Turkey and the Armenian genocide)[15] to the most meaningful request ('the five elements' definition below). Between these poles lie *expressions of sorrow*, *apologies*, and *explicit requests for forgiveness*: Along this continuum one can also find vague forms of request that do not necessarily make direct use of these phrases.

What follows now is an explanation of the different uses of the three utterances and the intentions that can be ascribed to them in the context of a grave injustice.[16]

[13] Speech act: doing something by saying something. Jenny Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics*. (London and New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 49, 51; F. V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 8.

[14] Lakoff, 'Nine', p. 201.

[15] Denial of wrongdoing is included as part of the continuum. Although it is problematic to refer to a denial as a form of asking for forgiveness – the denial of a crime is certainly not a request for forgiveness – the terminology in this article requires articulation of all the reference options available to a wrongdoer in the context of a call for an apology. These options include refusing to define the wrong as such.

[16] The explained phenomenon is 'types of requests' even though that includes utterances which are not usually considered a request for forgiveness. Some words could function not only in their lexical meaning but also as another speech act. Thus, there are several words or expressions in a language that function as a request for forgiveness in a sense of articulating a degree of responsibility

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'We are sorry'

Because it does not necessarily include an acknowledgement of responsibility this is the lowest or least meaningful type of utterance compared to an apology or request for forgiveness. Although the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'sorry' as 'feeling regret', this type of request for forgiveness could lack all expression of regret. It could also convey only partial regret. Furthermore, one can condemn an act one did not commit and for which one bears no responsibility. As Lazare points out, 'one way to avoid taking responsibility for an offence is to use the phrase "I am sorry" or "I regret" [. . .]'[17] For politicians, saying sorry is one of the strategies that allows them to avoid accepting responsibility. When sorrow is expressed on the political level, the transgressor usually intends not to take responsibility for the wrongdoing (excuses and justifications are common in such cases), but to rid itself of the nuisance, namely the victim's demands for corrective action. In many expressions of sorrow the common phrase is, 'We are sorry but . . .', indicating an insincere and evasive apology.[18]

Apology

This form of utterance is more formal than the previous one. The word 'apology' is from the Greek word *apologia*: a statement of defense regarding the behavior or views of a party. Apologia is the appeal of a defendant accused of wrongdoing. It is a refusal to ask forgiveness. A similar term to *apologia* would be a non-apology: a diplomatic formulation intended to clear the air without accepting full responsibility for a harmful act.[19] Although in the field of Linguistic-Pragmatics 'apology' implies some degree of responsibility,[20] when states use this word in the international arena (and we must remember that an apology is not a spontaneous act), they do not necessarily intend to take full responsibility or admit guilt for a wrong. An 'apology' may be a statement of defense – an explanation or excuse – but not an act of accountability as one would expect it to be. It is not this article's intention to argue that apologies stating responsibility do not exist in international politics. However, when analysing apology texts one finds that it is not unusual for the apology to be accompanied by excuses intended to create ambiguity about the

regarding a terrible past. Because the most important speech act is 'forgive us' I decided to name the examined phenomenon: types of requests for forgiveness.

[17] Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, pp. 1–2, 35, 52; Lazare, 'On Apology', p. 98. In this article, sorrow is perceived as a broader concept than regret since it has more semantic and pragmatic functions (Pragmatics is a linguistic field that emphasises the meaning in use or meaning in context, that is, contextual meaning, of an utterance by a speaker). One of these functions is regret. An expression of sorrow referring to the victim is stronger than an expression of regret in cases where the latter focuses on the self (the speaker) and fails to acknowledge the harm to the other. Moreover, when an expression of sorrow includes regret it is stronger than regret alone.

[18] Lakoff, 'Nine', pp. 203–4.

[19] Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, p. 52; Cohen, 'Apology', pp. 186, 191–3.

[20] J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969). Whereas when an apology is issued, the party that apologises is the wrongdoer (or its representative) and the responsibility is ascribed to the apologising party. This is not necessarily so when a party says it is sorry.

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responsibility for the wrong.[21] Examining why a wrongdoer state apologises can lead us to conclude that taking responsibility for the wrong is not a priority. Thus, apology (and also saying sorry) can be used to give the appearance of a meaningful request for forgiveness when in fact it is only a ruse to assuage others.[22]

When a perpetrator state issues an apology it does not necessarily seeks forgiveness from the victim of a wrong. Therefore, although it can increase the victim group's willingness to forgive an apology between international actors may be successful even if explicit forgiveness is not forthcoming. Thus, an expression of sorrow or an apology carries no inherent expectation that the victim will respond by forgiving.[23] The purpose of an apology or expression of sorrow is to acknowledge a transgression and perhaps to take responsibility for it without the assurance of a response from the victim group. By apologising, a perpetrator state does what is expected of it and it is this fulfilling of expectations that it considers important. The speech-act can only serve the perpetrator's interests or wider agenda. The emphasis here is on the transgressor and not on the victim. Therefore, the objective in apology and expression of sorrow is not always reconciliation with the victim, especially when the request is imposed on the perpetrator or stems from self-interest.

'Forgive us'

This is the most meaningful speech-act of the three. Where there is intention of expressing genuine apology and repentance, the party responsible for the harm requests the victim's forgiveness.[24] Usually this speech-act is used when the relevant party experiences a sense of guilt and accountability regarding the offence. Of the three forms of request for forgiveness presented here this is the only one that shows a clear expectation of response from the victim group. 'Forgive us' addresses the victim directly: the offender asks and anticipates that it will be released by the victim from material and emotional debt. The expectation in asking for forgiveness is atonement and the objective is reconciliation. This is the only phrase out of the three in which the perpetrator and the victim can use the same word in their

[21] An example of such a case is when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert apologised to his Turkish counterpart in 2007 for possibly violating Turkey's airspace if indeed there was a violation. For additional examples see: S. Harris, K. Grainger, and L. Mullany, 'The Pragmatics of Political Apologies', *Discourse and Society*, 17 (2006), pp. 715–37.

[22] This article argues that apologies may be partial, and that similar to cases of expressions of sorrow, atonement, admission of guilt and/or responsibility (full or partial) do not necessarily follow. There are cases where the wrongdoer only apologises for the wrong's occurrence. Of course, apologetic utterances can also be followed by expressions of sorrow, responsibility, and so on. Partial apologies are discussed by Barry O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 185. Just as we find different types of apology (different usages of the word), this research presupposes that there can also be different types of expression of sorrow (on the different functions of saying sorry see: Z. Kampf, 'Public (non) Apologies: The Discourse of Minimizing Responsibility', *Journal of Pragmatics*, (2009), doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2008.11.007). For additional definitions of apology see: Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971); Kathleen Gill, 'The Moral Functions of an Apology', *The Philosophical Forum*, xxxi: 1 (2000), pp. 11–27.

[23] This stands in contradiction to Tavuchis, who sees apology as a speech-act aimed at seeking forgiveness. Tavuchis, 'Mea Culpa', p. 27.

[24] Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, p. 36.

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speech-act – 'forgive'. The stakes are highest here because uttering 'forgive us' involves a direct appeal to the victim which may simply refuse to forgive. Even though 'forgive us' is the most meaningful utterance, few examples of its usage are found in the international arena. One of these was the occasion Germany's president Rau addressed the Israeli parliament in 2000 and asked for forgiveness for the Holocaust.

These formulae for asking forgiveness all share one common factor: the request is an act of liberation. It can potentially release the perpetrator from the weight and debt of the past with all their associated negative feelings. The most meaningful type of request for forgiveness is the one that fulfills the requirements of the five elements definition, which we turn to next.

The five elements: definition of a request for forgiveness

The definition presented here is an ideal type definition in the Weberian sense. It entails an explicit request for forgiveness; follows a wrong that the applicant committed with malice aforethought; and contains the following five elements: (1) public acknowledgement that an injustice took place; (2) public admission of responsibility for the injustice perpetrated by the state asking for forgiveness; (3) an expression of regret or remorse (the perpetrator declares that the wrong should not have occurred in general and by it in particular and promises that it will not happen again); (4) the provision of material compensation; and (5) an expectation to be forgiven (a desire to make amends and reconcile).

The elements of responsibility and compensation are crucial to this discussion. An admission of responsibility is a very important symbolic act that could result in reparations. Compensation could be regarded as an admission of responsibility, and so it need not be accompanied by a verbal statement of regret or atonement. The significance of a request for forgiveness in the international context becomes greater when accompanied by material compensation.

The five elements definition facilitates the construction of the continuum of the types of asking for forgiveness and establishes criteria for positioning the different types on it since it provides a means for differentiating between them. Each of the four first elements can be considered a request for forgiveness. Though occasionally we find a combination of two or more elements in one type of request, clearly, the more elements a request contains, the more meaningful, important, and sincere it will be. The types of request located along the continuum include expressions of sorrow, apologies, explanations, excuses, justifications, non-apologies, and vague (or explicit) requests for forgiveness. All may be accompanied by elements from the above definition, which means there are many ways to ask for forgiveness. The different types of requests denote varying degrees of responsibilities in relation to a wrongdoing, culminating in the most significant type of request. Mostly, states would rather use expressions of sorrow, partial apologies, vague requests, and non-apologies than ask for forgiveness, which is more meaningful and riskier. Although no empirical case fulfils all conditions of the five elements definition, even the less meaningful types of requests are also significant: the different types of forgiveness (excluding the refusal to acknowledge wrong) are attempts to address

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a problematical past. It should also be mentioned that the victim's reactions or actions can also be considered when evaluating types of request.

In sum, the continuum of types of requests for forgiveness characterises the wrongdoer state's strategy for addressing its wrongdoing. This strategy may change depending on the options along the continuum. At one end of the continuum lies the refusal to ask for forgiveness and the denial of the transgression and of the very fact that the state's act can be defined as such. At the other end of the continuum lies the all-inclusive request that includes the five elements of the definition presented here and means that the perpetrator remembers the past and is confronting it. Thus, the continuum can help us determine how near or far the utterances (or deeds) are from a full request for forgiveness. It can also help in assessing a state's perception of its responsibility for a wrong. We can refer to the continuum as an historical continuum indicating the different perspectives a wrongdoer state has of its past.[25] Thus, the continuum of different types of request for forgiveness provides a tool for tracing a state's process in dealing with a wrong. The continuum is therefore also a device to examine what follows a certain type of request.

It is important to note that we cannot determine the category of a certain type of request for forgiveness by examining the request alone. Moreover, merely analysing the request – its wording or the act – can be misleading when trying to assess the weight of the request. It is important to trace the process that led to the request and we can achieve this by examining the two explanatory variables introduced below. However, before analysing why a state would request forgiveness for wrongdoing we must define the term 'wrongdoing'.

Wrongdoing

The anarchic nature of the international system creates many opportunities for wrongdoing to occur. Indeed, wrongdoings of all kinds can be found in international relations (genocide, slavery, ethnic cleansing, and so forth).[26] Wrongdoings are grave offences that raise the most difficult moral questions. In this article, wrongdoing is defined as an injustice.[27] In its limited sense, '[. . .] injustice refers to recognition by alleged perpetrators of their own commission of gross injustice [. . .].'[28] Brooks defines human injustice as the violation of human rights or basic freedoms that are acknowledged in international law.[29] A wrongdoing is

[25] Lind presents a similar continuum. Lind situates a state's view of its past along a continuum between apologetic and unapologetic: Jennifer M. Lind, 'Apologies and Threat Reduction in Postwar Europe', paper prepared for delivery at the Memory of Violence Workshop (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 24–25 January 2003).

[26] A request for forgiveness could refer to an historical or recent wrongdoing.

[27] John Rawls, in his well-known book, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971) views justice as fairness.

[28] Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000), p. xxx.

[29] Brooks, 'The Age of Apology', p. 7. The demand for a request for forgiveness could be made for an historical injustice that was not considered an injustice at the time it was perpetrated (for example, slavery). The demand will be raised by the victim's descendants at a later period as the result of the institutionalisation of human rights norms.

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considered a non-normative action and an illegitimate tool in the exercise of relations in the international community. Self-defense or national security interests cannot justify such an act and thus it can never be regarded as an acceptable course of action. A wrongdoing originates in the perpetrator's refusal to recognise the rights of another group, and is deliberately calculated to circumvent the rights and freedoms of that group. It thus results in extensive and grave physical (sometimes accompanied by mental) harm and property damage. A wrongdoing is perceived in the collective memory of the victim group as an injustice that resonates beyond its temporal context, a crime that is aimed at all members of the group as a unit and cannot be forgiven.[30]

It should be noted that in order for an offence to be defined as a wrongdoing, a grave misdeed must be identified: the victim or perpetrator (or a third party) must accept it as such and declare it publicly. However, the definition of certain actions (offences) as wrongdoings can be open to interpretation and debate (for example, the definition of the great Ukrainian famine of 1932 as genocide). When a group claims itself the victim of a wrong the wrongdoer may try to prove that the act was not a wrong at all and that, moreover, it was not an offence (to explain its reservations about asking forgiveness).[31] Clearly, therefore, the application of legal standards can help us to answer the question, 'what constitutes international wrongdoing?' though even in international law there is room for interpretation (for example, whereas the four Geneva conventions define what constitute a grave breach, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court – in article 17(1)(d) – leaves room for debate). For this reason, the present article offers a definition of wrongdoing with subjective characteristics.

Why states ask for forgiveness

We can explain a state's request for forgiveness in terms of a combination of two explanatory variables: the degree of severity that a state attributes to its wrongdoing and the extent to which a state perceives that its image is threatened by the wrongful act. These variables are interconnected since they influence each other. They offer us the means to evaluate the process a wrongdoer undergoes when coming to term with its past. Alone, each variable is a necessary but not sufficient condition to explain a request for forgiveness. Together, however, they provide an integrative explanation. To understand why a particular type of request is used we must also assess each explanatory variable in terms of the three degrees of internalisation suggested by Wendt: coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy. As we shall see, when the motives for requesting forgiveness involve coercion the meaningfulness of the request becomes questionable. The quality of the request becomes enhanced when the second degree, namely self-interest, is involved. However, the most meaningful requests are those that stem from the third degree,

[30] This interpretation of wrongdoing resembles Kelman and Hamilton's definition of sanctioned massacre. See: H. C. Kelman, and V. L. Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 12–3.

[31] Actions during war time may be interpreted as a necessity and a success by the winning side and as a wrong by the defeated side. The perception of Hiroshima is an example. See also footnote 29.

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legitimacy. Here, the wrongdoer (not just the leadership but also the citizens) internalised the norm which condemns its wrong, a deed that does not correspond with the state's self-perceived identity.

It is important to note that whereas the third degree of internalisation reflects a state's internal agreement – within its political parties and society – to come to terms with its past (a long process which involves internalising the wrong's severity and the reconstruction of collective identity) and make a significant request for forgiveness a possibility, the first two degrees of internalisation reflect the international cost-benefit considerations faced by politicians in their capacity as heads of state. It is probable that when the first two degrees are involved internal divisions or objections will arise regarding the question of requesting forgiveness. When internal objections to requesting forgiveness arise, but at the same time it is believed that requesting forgiveness can benefit the state, or if external pressures are also brought to bear on the country to request forgiveness, one can assume that the leader (who desires re-election) will consider both the internal opposition and the external pressure when deciding whether requesting forgiveness is ultimately advantageous to the state. The internal divisions will influence the type of request (if issued), thus rendering the request less meaningful as the leader has compromised between the state's internal and international considerations.[32]

The degree of severity attributed to the wrongdoing

Once a wrongdoer agrees to classify an act as a wrong its severity may be defined as either low, moderate, high. When an act is defined as an injustice its severity can be perceived differently by different international actors. The victim may classify the act as grave whereas the perpetrator would call it moderately severe.[33] How a wrongdoer classifies a wrong will affect the type of request for forgiveness it makes.

Harm is acknowledged as a wrongdoing by the behaviour and statements of prominent policy makers from the state that committed the act: through formal expressions, declarations, and official announcements, and by the consequent actions; or through an action not preceded by a statement, which can be understood as an acknowledgment. Thus, the deliberations leading to the acknowledgement of a wrong should also be considered. Moreover, a demand to provide a remedy for a past transgression might spark a discourse of guilt, which would also indicate how the perpetrator classes the wrong. In other words, we must also investigate the public atmosphere and discourse.

How the perpetrator state perceives the 'other', the victim of the wrong, will also help us to understand the circumstances wherein a state may acknowledge a wrong as such. If state A perceives the other B as the enemy, A does not recognise

[32] A detailed discussion of the inner debates surrounding a request for forgiveness and their implications is beyond the scope of this article. In her book, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), Lind discusses the internal backlash and national debate that contrition might bring (as in the Japanese, Austrian, Australian, and other cases) and raises interesting and important questions.

[33] When a perpetrator perceives the harm as moderate or low, one could say that it is perceived as damage rather than a wrongdoing. Damage can be repaired, meaning what was lost can be restored, whereas wrongdoing is an unjustifiable evil. Therefore, its victims can never be fully compensated.

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B's right to exist as an autonomous entity and will not limit the use of violence against B.[34] It is this perception of the other which led to the perpetration of the wrong. As long as the perpetrator perceives the victim group as an enemy it will not ask for forgiveness or acknowledge the offence as a wrong. However, if A recognises B's right to exist because it acknowledges some minimal rights of the victim group and, moreover, wishes to establish friendly relations with it, then it becomes possible for A to perceive the wrong it committed and one could expect a request for forgiveness (the discourse of rights enables the discourse of apologies). Therefore, the type of request of forgiveness is affected by the degree to which the aggressor is willing to change the pattern of relations prior to the request.

In sum, a state's acknowledgment of an offence as a moral wrong allows it to request forgiveness. The type of request is determined by the severity the state attributes to the wrong. If a perpetrator state does not categorise an act as wrongdoing it cannot evaluate the severity and will not request forgiveness. Subsequently, if a perpetrator state acknowledges its action as a moral wrong, the first question is how does it define the extent of the wrong (degree of severity) and the second question is what motivated its acknowledgement of the wrong: Was it coerced into the acknowledgement? Was it motivated by self-interest? Or did it perceive its act as illegitimate?

Effect of the perception of severity on the type of request for forgiveness

By definition, a moral wrong represents a high degree of injustice. Therefore, when an act is identified as a wrongdoing one can assume it refers to a serious harm with a high degree of severity. If a perpetrator state classes a wrong as of low severity, a lower grade request for forgiveness will follow. In these cases, we can assume that the perpetrator will only request forgiveness if this is expedient otherwise it would have to be coerced. If a perpetrator defines the severity as moderate or low it is questionable whether it has internalised the seriousness of the harm and its responsibility for it.

If a perpetrator expresses sorrow for a past transgression or apologises without being willing to compensate the victim group (that is, when a perpetrator is only trying to meet expectations like Putin's 2006 acknowledgement of moral responsibility for the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia), the request for forgiveness follows from coercion or self-interest. These motives can also lead to non-apologies, defensive statements, or direct requests for forgiveness without offers of reparations. Reasons of coercion or self-interest indicate that perpetrator states perceive the wrong as moderate or low in severity, or, indeed, do not see the act as wrongdoing at all. The sincerity of such requests is questionable, rendering them less meaningful.

Requesting forgiveness accompanied by reparations, expectations of reconciliation, and other factors of the five elements definition suggests a motive linked to genuine internalisation. The journey from committing a wrong to understanding its

[34] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 260.

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gravity is not direct, and usually stems from a lengthy internal process of confronting the past. Recognising that a moral wrong was committed, that it was grave, and that the state is accountable for it is caused by a change in beliefs: Wendt's third degree of internalisation.[35] After internalisation the perpetrator state will voluntarily compensate the victim group because that is 'the right way to act'. Here, the request for forgiveness is meaningful, and stems from a revised perception of the 'other' that could even, in time, engender a common identity.[36]

A forgiveness request may stem from a need to rehabilitate a damaged image. Here, the perpetrator's need for the forgiveness of the victim (or the international community) may lead to the request for forgiveness. Thus, the severity ascribed to a wrong cannot itself explain a request for forgiveness. A more valid explanation for the request would also consider the extent to which a state perceives a threat to its image from the wrong. Indeed, when debating whether to ask for forgiveness, a wrongdoer would consider the ramifications for its image.

The extent to which a state perceives that a wrongful act threatens its image

Like individuals, states can feel shame, guilt, and regret possibly resulting in a request for forgiveness. Why does a country feel ashamed? Why would it admit accountability for a past wrong? What factors could challenge the collective memory shaping the national narrative? The answer to all these is the threat of its past injustice to its image, which in turn threatens its recognition, or hoped for recognition, as a legitimate actor in the international arena.

The threat to a state's image has both external and internal origins. Persistent demands from victims and other actors to address a past moral wrong represent an external threat to the perpetrator state's image. Internally, the threat to this image is linked to the state's desire to rehabilitate its society, distance itself from the regime that committed the wrong, rid itself of the wrong's negative connotations and influences, and heal its internal wounds. When a state perceives a threat to its image, some response is required and one option is to ask for forgiveness.

A state's perception of a threat to its image both at home and abroad can be evaluated as low, moderate, or high. We can measure the threat perception, as in the last explanatory variable, through the expressions and actions of leaders and policy makers as well as by the society's internal discourse. The reaction of other actors to the wrong is important to consider as well.

The next section elaborates on the question of collective image and how a state can improve this. As we shall see, the need to improve an image is significantly linked to the idea of collective memory.

[35] Acknowledging a wrong as possessing a high degree of severity when the motive is the third degree of internalisation does not obligate using the phrase 'forgive us'.

[36] Dale. C. Copeland, 'The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay', *International Security*, 25:2 (2000), p. 193.

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Collective image

The collective image of a state has two dimensions: internal and external, which do not always coincide but together compose the state's image. Here, a collective image resembles what Reus-Smit defines as social identities: 'sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking into account the perspectives of others [. . .].'[37] Internally, an image is based upon social identity. In this article, I define the internal dimension of the state's image as a perception of belonging shared by members of a certain group. This perception leads to identification with the group and is shaped by the particular historical memory and historical narrative that the group embraces. Socially constructed, identity is influenced, and can be changed, by interactions between individuals. A transgression by a former regime could contradict and threaten the group identity that the current government wishes to nurture and imbibe.[38]

The external dimension of the state's image concerns the notion of reputation. Reputation is a relative concept. A state's reputation is not solely its possession but the possession of other states since it emanates from their perception of that state.[39] Mercer defines reputation as a judgment of someone's character (or inclination) that is used to foresee or explain future behavior.[40] Statesmen regard the reputation of their state as important. Awareness of your reputation means knowing how others view you.

For other actors to believe in a state's image, that state must provide evidence of the accuracy of that image;[41] similarly, if it wishes to change its image, it must convince others that its current image is no longer accurate. A state that committed a wrongdoing in the past can convey a positive, unthreatening image by requesting forgiveness. According to the apology theory developed by Lind,[42] an apology reduces the appearance of threat emanating from the offensive act and helps to improve a state's reputation by presenting a more desirable image. Lind argues that apologies diminish the perception of threat whereas a lack of apology increases it. A request for forgiveness can thus improve a state's image. By ameliorating other states' perceptions of it as a threat, a request for forgiveness can help to prevent a pact forming against the perpetrator state. As Walt maintains, states balance not only material capabilities but offensive intentions.[43] Thus, if state A can convince state B that it has friendly intentions by requesting forgiveness, then state B will be more inclined to cooperate with state A. Conversely, an actor's refusal to deal

[37] C. Reus-Smit, 'The Constitutional Structure of international Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions', *International Organization*, 51:4 (1997), p. 564.

[38] Many studies deal with collective identity. For example: Joseph Lapid and Fredrich Kratochwil (eds), *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Katzenstein Peter (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); H. C. Kelman, 'Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social Psychological Perspective', in Bar-Siman-Tov (ed.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*.

[39] Shiping Tang, 'Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict', *Security Studies*, 14:1 (2005), pp. 37–8.

[40] Jonathan. L. Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 6.

[41] Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 8.

[42] Lind, 'Apologies and Threat Reduction'.

[43] Stephen. M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

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with its past transgression, namely by not requesting forgiveness, can have repercussions on its reputation. It should also be mentioned that, because of a spillover effect, improving a state's reputation can promote the formation of a positive internal identity.

Adherence to norms by requesting forgiveness will help to establish behavioral transparency and a reputation of conformity, thus diminishing threat perceptions.[44] A request for forgiveness sends a message that the apologiser is complying with certain norms supported by other states (even if it is motivated by self-interest and has not internalised the legitimacy of the norm), and is saying in effect that it is willing to accept the community's norms in order to be included in that community.

The subject of a state's image raises related issues of honor and moral prestige. Credibility and the building of moral prestige can often explain the conduct of states in the international system.[45] Displays of good will, attainment of prestige, and saving face are not ephemeral objectives. These are aspects of the state's image that contribute greatly to the fulfillment of the state's purposes.[46] Prestige and honour have always been symbols of social status[47] and can indicate which states are considered a part of the international community and which are left outside. A past moral wrong can effect present image. Criticism can damage the actor's self-esteem (one component of the internal dimension of image) and moral prestige and undermine the image it wishes to possess and exhibit.[48] Requesting forgiveness is a restorative act that can position the offender differently since it implies moral transformation, and helps to prevent further damage to its image. It is a tool that a state can use to rehabilitate its reputation and moral credibility in the eyes of other states, and thus earn prestige and honor, as in the case of West Germany after World War II.

The two dimensions of a state's image – reputation and identity – give rise to what I call here the state's 'ontological self': its self-definition and interactions with other actors. Acceptance of this 'self' by 'others' forms part of its struggle for recognition. Recognition is a social act that bestows legitimacy on a states' image. Only through recognition can actors acquire and preserve their unique identity: subjectivity depends on intersubjectivity.[49] When a state commits a gross wrong, its recognition and the legitimate status it seeks in the present are jeopardised and a request for forgiveness can help to improve its image (and status) by detaching it from its historical image as a transgressor. However, it could also be argued that refusing to request forgiveness could promote a positive image. How is this possible? To answer this, we must consider the meaning and importance of collective memory.

[44] F. V. Kratochwil, 'How Do Norms Matter?' in M. Byers (ed.), *The Role of Law in International Politics: Essays in International Relations and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 54.
[45] Oded Löwenheim, ' "Do Ourselves Credit and Render a Lasting Service to Mankind": British Moral Prestige, Humanitarian Intervention and the Barbary Pirates', *International Security Quarterly*, 47:1 (2003), pp. 23–48.
[46] Jervis, *The Logic of Images*, p. 7.
[47] Samuel. N. Eisenstadt, *Power, Trust, and Meaning: Essays in Sociological Theory and Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 244.
[48] Rational actors try to exhibit acceptable images. Jervis, *The Logic of Images*, p. 15.
[49] Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State is Inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations*, 9:4 (2003), p. 511.

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Collective memory

Memory is essential in forming individual and group identity.[50] And in this sense, the state's collective memory constitutes its image. Memory also constructs the state's perception of its responsibility for a past wrongdoing and therefore influences the type of request for forgiveness. The collective memory binds the narratives and historical heritage of the state engendering its subjects' sense of belonging and loyalty. Pierre Nora defines collective memory as '[. . .] what remains of the past in the lived reality of groups, or what these groups make of the past'.[51] Thus, memory is dynamic and depends on social context. New memories can be introduced and even for that matter, new history. By changing or redesigning memory through denying or admitting aggression by asking forgiveness, a new or different image can be formed. It is important to note that changes in a state's memory also change perceptions of wrongdoings, which in turn influences the type of request for forgiveness.

Having said that we can understand why a demand for an apology that raises the spectre of a problematic and unpleasant past might be perceived as a threat to a state's image: the victim group challenges the collective memory of the perpetrator group and thence its identity and reputation. Challenging a group memory, namely, challenging the way an historical memory is represented internally and externally by the perpetrator group, can undermine the recognition it has garnered. Since how a state remembers its past carries ramifications regarding its identity formation, an external threat to its reputation when a problematic past is raised can spill over and threaten its identity.

If a state which is accused of a past moral wrong consistently denies the accusations (like Turkey and the Armenian genocide), or has a different perception of the event, then it will perceive asking for forgiveness as detrimental to its image as it essentially confirms the accusations. Heritage, continuity, and being part of a positively regarded group is important to the citizens of a state. People feel connected to their national past and would prefer it to be glorious. If a wrongdoing is denied the state's image will stay intact. However, while a state may choose to erase problematic elements from the collective conscience, historical narrative, or memory, the demand for an apology will remind it of events it would rather forget or put behind itself. The shadow of the past equally covers the guilty and the innocent. Thus, a continued refusal to ask for forgiveness might be a defensive response to allegations.[52] States will try to separate their present identities from those of their past. For instance, after the Second World War, Germany established an identity and reputation based on being different from Nazi Germany. It is possible to argue that if Germany is no longer the same state why should it ask for forgiveness after the war? The answer is that a state's image is not just founded on what it presents to the outside (the narrative or its memory

[50] Patrick. H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover and London: University of Vermont, 1993), p. 24.
[51] Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 95.
[52] Jerzy Jedlicki, 'Heritage and Collective Responsibility', in Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore and Peter Winch (eds), *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 55–7.

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of the event that it chooses to present). It must also be accepted by other international actors (the victim group and other states). It is not enough to claim that it is a different state now. A state that has committed a wrong in the past cannot ignore it forever and cannot choose amnesia as a strategy (anyway, it is rather difficult to ignore the past when the victims' descendents keep making demands). States bear responsibility for the past regimes' actions and it is legitimate to expect them to ask forgiveness and acknowledge responsibility for wrongdoing in their past. If the descendants of such regimes refuse to confront and come to terms with their inherited past (and to face their inherited responsibility for its consequences which still resonate in and affect the present) through a request for forgiveness, they perpetuate the negative image.

The connection between the image threat and the type of request for forgiveness

A request for forgiveness is a corrective action. The past cannot be changed or deleted and moral wrong cannot be forgiven. However, an image resulting from that past may be transformed by a request for forgiveness in the present which in turn could gain the victim's agreement to forgive. In short, the perception of the wrongdoer is alterable.

Image is therefore important as it influences the behavior of international actors. A state that has committed a moral wrong in the past might request forgiveness because it wishes to present a new and different image to its citizens and the world. One reason why it is expedient to shed the old image is self-interest: association with the wrong could endanger the state's relations with other states and thwart the fulfilment of its interests (for example, Libya's desire to have the post-Lockerbie sanctions lifted). In such cases, the wrongdoer state does not internalise that the act was morally repugnant or that it bears responsibility for it. Rather, it senses that it should act that way because other states have condemned it. The perpetrator in this scenario wishes to be perceived as supporting the norm that condemns the wrongdoing. In another scenario, a perpetrator might be coerced into taking steps to ameliorate its image by other actors pressuring it to do so (like the de-Nazification of Germany after WWII).

And finally, a state's efforts to improve its image may stem from an internal process: it seeks to change its image because the wrong is inconsistent with its desired identity and reputation. In the last scenario, the perpetrator internalises that the wrong is illegitimate (an interesting example is Britain's expression of remorse and guilt in 1814 over its role in the African slave trade) and embraces the wrong within its collective memory. In such cases, we cannot separate the reason for remedying the threat to the state's image, especially the threat internally, from emotions roused by the wrong. Expressions of feelings such as shame, embarrassment, or guilt may indicate that the perpetrator has internalised the moral repugnance of an act, its responsibility for it, and its support for the norm condemning such acts. This was the case in 1952 when West Germany's president, Heuss, expressed the country's shame in his address at Bergen-Belsen. These feelings, which arise because the state's image has been damaged by the wrongdoing, are incompatible with the identity and reputation which the state

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desires for itself.[53] A request for forgiveness can help the state to deal with these emotions by bridging the gap between the negative feelings and a desired or perceived positive image. Requests for forgiveness motivated by emotion could be viewed as sincere.[54]

Prima facie it seems that the greater the threat of a moral wrong from the past to a state's image, the greater the chances of it asking for forgiveness. If the state perceives the threat as high it is likely that the request will be meaningful and contain several factors of the five elements definition described above, including, very possibly, material indemnity. However, a state's perception of the severity of its wrongdoing must still be taken into account. If the wrongdoer perceives the threat to its image as high (due to external pressure), but fails to internalise the wrong as severe, it will very possibly not ask for forgiveness. When a wrongdoer internalises (leadership and society) that a wrong has been committed and perceives the wrong as a serious threat to its image (that is, the wrong does not correspond with its image), one would expect a meaningful request. It is also important to note that when the threat perception is low, it is likely that a request for forgiveness will not be made, or if it is made, that it will not be meaningful. When the threat is not perceived as high, the request, if made, will probably be an account, explanation, excuse, or expression of sorrow. It will not likely be accompanied by compensation. We can also assume that if the threat to the image is not perceived as high, then the wrongdoer has not internalised its responsibility for the act, or perhaps has not internalised that the severity of the wrong is high.

To test the theoretical arguments raised here the case of the 'Adenauer Declaration' in September 1951 will be examined. Compared to Chancellor Brandt's 'knee-fall' at the Warsaw memorial, President von Weizsacker's speech in 1985, or President Rau's historic apology before the Israeli parliament in 2000, Adenauer's declaration has received relatively little scholarly attention in the context of the subject of this article. As mentioned in the introduction, the German case is paradigmatic due to the unique way Germany confronted its Nazi past. It is therefore important to study the first of several requests for forgiveness, which was also West Germany's first gesture toward Israel, and the next section will therefore analyse the reasons behind Adenauer's declaration and determine the type of request for forgiveness it represents.

[53] People experience the feelings of the group they belong to. Historical divisions and accusations over the past stimulate emotion because they affect the sense of belonging to or being in solidarity with a multi-generational community (a kind of supra-family). Thus, an individual who has not participated in the harmful deed of its group could feel guilt or shame in the name of the group. Michael J. Wohl, A. Branscombe and R. Nyla, 'Forgiveness and Collective Guilt Assignment to Historical Perpetrator Groups Depend on Level of Social Category Inclusiveness', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88:2 (2005), pp. 288–303. A debt from the past is a heavy burden on the consciences of the group members. This burden will pose a threat to the group's current collective image. Jedlicki, 'Heritage', pp. 74–6.

[54] Differentiating between 'true' feelings and the instrumental use of them in the political arena could potentially be a difficult process. Indeed, actors could emphasise emotion when it would help them realise their interests. Such a display of emotions, deriving from self-interest, would clearly not be genuine. But the fact that actors use emotions in requests for forgiveness (even if the motive is instrumental) emphasises the importance of emotions in IR: the side that uses emotions believes that others perceive them as important and thus that they are influential. Neta Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics', *International Security*, 24:4 (2000), pp. 132, 155.

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Adenauer's declaration

Speaking before the Bundestag on 27 September 1951, the West German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, declared:

> The Federal Government and with it the great majority of the German people are aware of the immeasurable suffering that was brought upon the Jews in Germany and the occupied territories during the time of National Socialism [. . .] unspeakable crimes have been committed **in the name of the German people**, calling for moral and material indemnity [. . .] The Federal Government are prepared, jointly with representatives of [. . .] the state of Israel [. . .], to bring about a solution of the **material indemnity** problem, thus easing the way to the spiritual settlement of infinite suffering [. . .] (emphasis added).[55]

Adenauer claimed that the offer for restitution was morally motivated. Men who knew and worked with Adenauer at the time of the Bundestag statement agreed that one of his principal motivations was a sense of moral obligation toward the Jews and the State of Israel – a desire to make amends. But he also had political motives, which he himself freely confessed.[56] According to Auerbach, while perhaps not the sole reason behind Adenauer's decision to issue the declaration, political pragmatism was undoubtedly the most important influence on his decision to issue the declaration, which paved the way for reparations and for the later establishment of formal relations between West Germany and Israel. Adenauer was a realistic leader who was aware of Germany's ostracised status and understood the very real possibility that a request for forgiveness to Israel and world Jewry might rehabilitate Germany as an equal member of the international community. Auerbach agrees with Gardner-Feldman that although moral considerations played a significant role, they did not suffice alone to cause Adenauer to issue the declaration. Adenauer's declaration was a far from satisfying request for forgiveness. But that does not mean he had no genuine feelings of guilt or remorse.[57]

Motives of both moral probity and political practicality are evident in Adenauer's policy toward Israel. There is a broad consensus that German foreign policy after 1949 was predicated on a need to regain acceptance and a degree of independence, meaning that Germany needed a new image. In the years 1949 to 1952, Germany normalised its relations with the Western occupation authorities through the eventual cancellation of the Occupation Statute. Economic and political rehabilitation proceeded more easily than military acceptance: Germany's past was of concern to the Western Powers and they were hesitant to accept Germany as a full and equal partner. In addition to this pressure, Adenauer faced the pressure of world opinion, which was intensified by Israel's constant reminders of Germany's crimes. The country had to prove that it had changed. The way to demonstrate this – and to become a full and equal partner in the Western 'family of nations' – was to make a gesture toward the Jews and Israel.[58]

Establishing relations with Israel was crucial to West Germany's objective of international rehabilitation as demonstrated by the fact that Germany's effort to

[55] Lily Gardner-Feldman, *The Special Relationship between West Germany and Israel* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 32–3, 40.
[56] Ibid., pp. 40–1.
[57] Auerbach, 'The Role of Forgiveness', pp. 169–71.
[58] Gardner-Feldman, *The Special Relationship*, pp. 50–1, 54, 56. By not denying Nazi atrocities, West Germany could allay Allied fears regarding the return of German militarism: Lind, *Sorry States*, p. 187.

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achieve equal partnership with the West was simultaneous with its efforts to make amends to Israel. Adenauer's statement on reparations was delivered three days after the disappointing start to negotiations with the Allies over the complete removal of the Occupation Statute,[59] and we can deduce that image was a consideration in Germany's decision to issue the statement. Adenauer's concern for world opinion, and by implication Germany's image, was expressed in the early part of his statement.[60]

I have several observations to make regarding Adenauer's Statement. In the quotation cited above, which appeared in the middle of the statement,[61] while acknowledging the tremendous seriousness of the wrong which he describes in the passive voice – despite the fact that taking responsibility is an active matter – he begins by exculpating most Germans. In fact, the declaration offers no list of German crimes or indication of their perpetrators' identity. Nor does it express responsibility or sentiments of remorse or repentance. Perhaps such sentiments are implied, but in general, Adenauer's declaration exonerates the German people: the new Germany have decided to pay compensation only out of a sense of honor and duty as the crimes were committed in the name of the German people. No reference is made to the right of the Jews to grant forgiveness.[62] Adenauer also shielded himself from exaggerated claims: 'Consideration should also be given to Germany's ability to pay [. . .]'.[63]

The declaration – intended as a statement of guilt, contrition, and responsibility (at least such was the Israeli demand in the negotiations leading to the declaration)[64] – was instead a type of request for forgiveness, which is an account, or at most, an expression of sorrow ('We sympathised with you, but we are not the perpetrators'). The declaration was directed at the world as much as Israel and world Jewry and marked the beginning of the process that would enable West Germany to redefine itself in a more positive light and achieve equal partnership in the emerging international community. The declaration thus served to advance West Germany's utilitarian interests.

This case exemplifies a possible combination of Wendt's second and the third degrees of internalisation regarding motives for acknowledging wrongdoing. On the one hand, Adenauer's declaration in the name of West Germany did not question the reality of the atrocities, which could indicate an internalisation of the fact that the acts were morally wrong, and an unacceptable injustice. On the other hand, as noted above, West Germany's public acknowledgment and condemnation of Nazi crimes served the state's utilitarian interests and political agenda. As Lind has suggested, it reduced the perception of threat from West Germany, reduced mistrust, and facilitated Germany's return to the international community as an equal member. But it might also be argued that Germany had no choice but to

[59] Gardner-Feldman, *The Special Relationship*, pp. 50–2, 56.
[60] Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 201.
[61] Ibid., p. 202.
[62] Ian Lustick, 'Negotiating Truth: The Holocaust, Lehavdil, and al-Nakba', in A. M. Lesch and I. Lustick (eds), *Exile and Return: Predicaments of Palestinians and Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 111–2; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 282–3.
[63] Segev, *The Seventh Million*, p. 202.
[64] Ibid., p. 201.

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acknowledge the Nazi atrocities in order to meet Allied expectations. Thus, fear of isolation was a coercive reason to issue the declaration (first degree of internalisation).

With regard to the second explanatory variable – the extent to which a state perceives its image is threatened by its wrongdoing – the actions taken by Germany to put forward a new positive image can be interpreted as instantiation of the three degrees of internalisation presented by Wendt. On the one hand, Germany was expected by the Western allies to establish an entirely new state entity and a new image by denunciating the Nazi regime. Thus, West Germany would have felt considerable outside pressure to prove it had changed (a form of coercion). The sense of pressure was balanced by the country's clear perception of its advantages from creating and generating a positive image. The country had been besmirched by the atrocities of the Holocaust, handicapping its ability to return to full and equal membership in the international community.

Can we argue that Germany strove to establish an image distinct from and contrasting with Nazi Germany because it had internalised the understanding that the Nazi actions were atrocities? Did Germany really want to change (third degree of internalisation)? Because the statement was issued only six years after the war ended, the answer is complex. In 1951, the German population was for the most part the same as during the war: a population that had supported the Nazi regime. Perhaps the Germans in 1951 had not yet internalised the fact that the Nazi's crimes were indeed crimes. After the war ended segments of the West German population denied the horrors of National Socialism. As Gardner-Feldman pointed out,[65] in a number of surveys conducted at the time, respondents expressed anti-democratic, and particularly anti-Semitic sentiments, and two-thirds denied even partial responsibility for the emergence of anti-Semitism. These sentiments provide evidence that not all Germans viewed the Nazi regime and its image as negative nor did they necessarily support the country's new image. The surveys then seem to reinforce the argument that West Germany strove to change its image either because it was in its interest to do so or because it had no choice as well as the argument that West Germany was wracked with internal contradictions, which had been projected onto the declaration.

But, nearly two-thirds of the population surveyed by the American military government in 1946 felt that the population as a whole should bear some blame for Nazi crimes, recognising that such crimes were committed on a massive scale. The population tended to accept responsibility for Hitler's crimes yet was deeply divided over the interpretation of that responsibility.[66] The survey pointed to an internal desire for a new image, which may have stemmed from some Germans' acknowledgement that atrocities were committed.

So, although Adenauer's declaration was a type of request for forgiveness the question is was it meaningful? The answer is that because the declaration lacked accountability and admission of guilt it was not a meaningful type of request for forgiveness despite Adenauer's belief that the Jews should be compensated for the Holocaust. In the theoretical section earlier, it is suggested that an offer of reparations points to sincerity and thence to the meaningfulness of the request, for

[65] Gardner-Feldman, *The Special Relationship*, p. 34.
[66] Ibid., p. 35.

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without a sense of responsibility or guilt why would a state offer material amends? We could argue that Adenauer expressed representative responsibility since the regime was now different. Germany's present regime did not commit the atrocities of the Second World War and therefore could only discuss the responsibility it had accepted to shoulder for the outcome of that war. The representative responsibility that Adenauer did accept and the compensation he offered may be a sign that the declaration was a meaningful request, a likely possibility given the victim group's endorsement of the declaration wording.[67]

Regarding the victim group, the fact that it commented on the declaration drafts carries several implications: first, its involvement in the request for forgiveness supposedly makes that request more meaningful. Second, the victim's remarks show that Germany's initial phrasing was inadequate due to insufficient internalisation of the wrong. Third, allowing the victim's representatives to comment on the declaration drafts served the perpetrator's image needs: the Jewish state's approval sent a powerful message to the rest of the world which strongly endorsed Germany's new image.

Yet, despite promising compensation, Adenauer's declaration was problematic in several ways that leads to rejection of the argument that it was a meaningful request for forgiveness. Although the responses to the declaration from the victim's representatives were positive we should not forget Israel's tremendous dependency on German reparations for its state-building needs. Israel's approval of the declaration may have been influenced by the fact that it might open the door to direct reparations negotiations with Germany.[68] Israel's dependency on German reparations is shown by the fact that even though Israel's remarks on the declaration's drafts were rejected this was not mentioned in its positive response to the declaration.

According to Auerbach, West Germany offered to pay reparations not only for reasons of moral probity but also as a political attempt to repair the tremendous damage the Nazis had caused to Germany's reputation. Although Adenauer acknowledged Germany's moral commitment toward the Jews, he diminished Germany's guilt and responsibility so that the declaration 'was not an authentic plea for atonement'.[69] We can try to understand why the declaration failed to contain the essential elements of a request for forgiveness if we consider it from a psychological standpoint, namely that the Germans could not confront their recent National Socialist past because they were paralysed by guilt, confusion, and psychological inadequacy. They reacted to the Nazi trauma with psychological defences, particularly projection and denial.[70] When the declaration was issued, it was only a matter of a few years since the horror that was the war had abated. In 1951, the Germans were just beginning to assimilate the ramifications of the war whose recentness explains why they baulked at admitting guilt and moral

[67] Lustick, 'Negotiating Truth', p. 113.
[68] Segev, *The Seventh Million*, p. 203. Note that in March 1951, Israel sent a letter requesting reparations to the four powers occupying Germany. At the time, Israel did not wish to negotiate directly with the Germans. However, in light of the Powers' insistence that Israel should appeal directly to the Germans, Israeli leaders had no alternative.
[69] Auerbach, 'The Role of Forgiveness', p. 171.
[70] Gardner-Feldman, *The Special Relationship*, pp. 33–4.

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responsibility.[71] Given the freshness of the traumas and the scars of war in the world's mind all such admissions would spark claims that West Germany had not changed. Germany used repression, refusal to admit guilt, and emphasis on having reformed to confront such claims. In short, it tried to present a different memory of the past.

We should also consider that West Germany was a new state whose identity was under construction at the time. No new state wants its identity tarnished by the past and therefore, from Germany's standpoint it had no choice but to make a move toward demonstrating that it had changed: this effort was embodied in Adenauer's statement.

A number of factors indicate that even though Germany's perceived threat to its image was real and needed to be addressed it was not as strongly feared as one might initially assume. First, in light of the reality of the Cold War, Adenauer was surely aware of the role the Western powers would allocate West Germany. A second factor was that the final stage in the negotiations towards ending the American occupation opened just a few days after Adenauer's speech[72] indicating that this public declaration that Germany had changed was all that was required to clinch the deal. Also, the victim's group had ratified the declaration before it was published, even though it did not fulfill its demand for a declaration of guilt.[73] These factors, combined with the declaration's proximity to the war, raise doubts that it was a completely sincere request for forgiveness. They also explain why the declaration lacked elements that could identify it as a meaningful type of request even though it acknowledges Nazi crimes as atrocities and offers compensation – and why its offer of compensation was accompanied by reservations making the statement primarily a function of self-interest and expediency.

But note that Adenauer's declaration led to the reparations agreement and to Israeli-West German relations. Israel had refused direct contact with the Germans before the declaration but afterwards consented to direct dialogue on reparations. In that sense the declaration and its outcome was a success. In spite the fact that, as this analysis shows, the declaration was not a request for forgiveness of a high degree, it remains a significant request in terms of Israeli-West German relations. The declaration probably facilitated the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1965. The example of this declaration teaches us that a political request for forgiveness can be an important and effective tool in international relations even when the request does not meet the criteria of a meaningful request.

Conclusion

This article explores why states which perpetrated gross crimes in the past request forgiveness from their victims (or other actors). It introduces a typology of requests for forgiveness that have differing levels of importance and meaningfulness, suggesting that they reflect the severity attributed to the wrongdoing and the extent

[71] Here it should be said that not all German parties supported Adenauer's declaration. It was opposed by the right-of-center parties. Lustick, 'Negotiating Truth', p. 111.
[72] Ibid., p. 115.
[73] Segev, *The Seventh Million*, pp. 203–05.

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to which a state perceives its image as threatened by its wrongful act. It concludes that when an actor internalises a past harmful act and perceives it as having both a high degree of severity and as presenting a significant threat to its image, we can expect a request for forgiveness and for that request to be meaningful.

Chancellor Adenauer's declaration in September 1951 was analysed to test the theoretical assumptions. The declaration was characterised as a form of request for forgiveness – albeit one lacking a high degree of meaningfulness according to the research definitions. It was shown that this request encapsulated Wendt's three degrees of internalisation thus substantiating the article's theoretical arguments. Ultimately, the analysis finds that the declaration was motivated primarily by utility and self-interest even though one could claim that it involved concerns for moral probity, specifically in relation to the German Chancellor (who it seems had internalised the terrible nature of the Nazi crimes). Despite these less than 'pure' motives, the declaration demonstrates the relevance of studying the less meaningful requests for forgiveness (the ones that are less than complete). Adenauer's declaration set in motion the incremental process of internalising German responsibility of the past which led to meaningful requests that in turn helped strengthen relations with Israel.[74] When a request is made, even if its motives are utilitarian, the power of words changes reality and the perpetrator cannot retract statements without sullying its reputation and damaging its credibility in the eyes of other states.

When asking for forgiveness the main issue is therefore the question of responsibility and accountability. The phenomenon studied here shows how far a wrongdoer state might be willing to take responsibility for a past transgression. How the offender perceives and addresses that past (in its collective memory and historical narrative) demonstrates how it defines its role in it and what course it may take to come to terms with it. In other words, an offender's approach to its past directly influences the degree of responsibility it is willing to assume and accordingly, the type of request for forgiveness it is prepared to make. The subject of this article is therefore most salient to the broader discussion of states' responsibility for their actions and the consequences of those actions in the international arena. Indeed, the question of responsibility has bearing on wrongdoers' relations with other international actors in general and especially on conflict resolution processes.

Responsibility discourse defines unacceptable behaviours among international actors. When a state requests forgiveness it creates a precedent which can establish a norm obliging other perpetrators to request forgiveness for past wrongs. Thus, the responsibility discourse expressed in political requests for forgiveness encourages the expansion of an international ethical discourse which in turn contributes to preserving order and stability.

The present model allows us to trace the process of requesting forgiveness from both the internal and external perspectives, providing the tools needed to examine

[74] The existence of this process is evident from references to the Holocaust by Germany's current Chancellor, Merkel. In her visit to Israel in 2006, Merkel said that the German people were 'full of shame for what happened. I am sorry that only a few righteous people were in Germany at that time' (Ilan Marciano, 'Merkel on Shoah: We're ashamed', YNET, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3208083,00.html (2006).

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the norms, principles and beliefs that came to be accepted in a former wrongdoer state and to understand its reasons for their acceptance.

To understand the entire phenomenon of political requests for forgiveness it would be interesting for future research to trace the aftermath of a request, namely, the actions and policies of a state (that is, government practice). These are the actual manifestations of the request for forgiveness, of the state's acceptance of responsibility for the wrong. Analysing a state's policies and actions in the wake of a request for forgiveness cannot be separated from its internal response toward that request. The internal response is especially important as it affects relations between the wrongdoer state and the victim group. In view of this it is important to explore whether a request for forgiveness invariably leads to reconciliation between former enemies. In my opinion, given the domestic debates that can surround a request for forgiveness, the answer to this question is that asking forgiveness does not necessarily promote reconciliation between former enemies. Internal divisions or a backlash resulting from a request for forgiveness could jeopardise reconciliation if groups at home rejected the request as a tool for improving their state's image. They might think that the request presents the collective identity in a negative light. Moreover, as Lind maintains, both the victim group and other international actors could be anxious about what the internal backlash in the wrongdoer state reveals about the country's intentions and willingness to promote peace.[75] The model suggested above can help us to determine in which circumstances a society will favour requesting forgiveness since, as asserted above, it follows the process of internalising the severity of the wrong and the state's perception of its responsibility for it. The presence of an internal backlash following a request for forgiveness raises the question of whether the internalisation has in fact taken place.

Finally, a research study aimed at exploring the aftermath of a request would complete the present study by providing the necessary tools for following the full process that a wrongdoer state undergoes when coming to terms with its past.

[75] For further discussion see Lind, *Sorry States*, pp. 179–98.

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