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Mediated recognition in campaigns for justice: The case of the Magdalene laundry survivors

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Abstract: The recognition perspective is a valuable lens through which identity struggles and historical marginalization and abuses can be explored. This study analyzes Ireland’s Justice for Magdalene (JFM) campaign between 2009–2013; JFM was a group that fought for a state apology and redress for women and girls confined to Catholic-run laundries between the 1920s and 1990s. Such institutions formed part of the post-colonial Irish identity and church-state structure, within which many women and girls once suffered. We document the rhetorical dimension of how a resolution was ultimately reached following the campaign’s transformation of women’s individual experiences into the collective voice of an advocacy group with targeted political goals. Focusing on JFM’s public press releases, we consider the media logic and rhetorical strategies of the group, which effectively built a case against the state. At the core of the discussion is the balance between the instrumental and constitutive functions of the organization’s messaging.

Keywords: campaigns, justice, media logic, recognition, rhetoric, constitutive rhetoric

1 Introduction

The human need, and political demand, for recognition is a central force in contemporary socio-political movements, especially true among oppressed groups who feel their experiences are unacknowledged by the state or fellow citizens. For many survivors of Ireland’s Magdalene laundries, narratives of indignity and silence prevailed for decades, their fates marked by shaming, misogynistic connotations associated with the archetype “fallen woman”. The recognition

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perspective has proven useful in explaining complexities around struggles of identity, historical trauma, and public memory, and this article sheds light on the rhetorical strategies and how this particular struggle for recognition plays out in the mediated public.

Magdalene laundries formed part of what Smith (2007) calls an “architecture of containment” of primarily Catholic-run institutions for vulnerable women and children in Ireland, a term capturing the intertwining of church-state relations since the state’s independence in 1922. The official 2013 report into Magdalene Laundries (known as the McAleese report) documented how they housed not only unmarried pregnant women and girls, but also those from police and the courts, church or state care, and family admissions. The laundries were most active between the 1920s and 1960s with the last closing in 1996 (McAleese, 2013, pp. 160–163). The report refers to 10,012 women and girls who passed through the laundries (p. 151), but this figure is based on records from only eight of the ten laundries. Testimonies of physical and psychological abuse in the institutions have been plentiful, describing how women were unable to freely leave and received no payment for their labor (Benítez-Castro and Hildago-Tenorio, 2018; Gott, 2021).

This article focuses on the Justice for Magdalene (JFM) campaign group, most active between 2009 and 2013, which described itself as “a non-profit, all-volunteer organization, which seeks to respectfully promote equality and advocate for justice and support for the women formerly incarcerated in Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries” (Justice for Magdalene, 2011). JFM had two primary objectives: to obtain a state apology for historical state involvement in the laundries and to secure a redress scheme. This article helps to understand recognition’s role and the form it took in the campaign by analyzing JFM’s press releases and by asking the question: What role do available media genres and media discourses play in transforming individual experiences into a unified struggle for recognition?

We aim to describe how this particular struggle for recognition plays out, how it ‘works’ rhetorically, and how the ‘struggle’ at the campaign’s heart is shaped by media logics. The vantage point of our analysis is rhetorical criticism, allowing us to consider the media’s role in recognition struggles, while still maintaining the actions of those who seek to influence their fellow citizens (i. e., JFM) as the primary object of analysis. By tracing the outline of the campaign through its press releases, a picture emerges: Systematically JFM builds its case to put the Irish state on trial before the tribunal of public opinion, and also before the Irish Human Rights Commission and the UN Committee Against Torture. As we demonstrate, the campaign’s message took the form of a forensic argument, which we break down into classical forensic rhetoric terms. Focusing on the recognition dimension, it also becomes clear that the campaign’s message works constitutively: By presenting it as a case of justice, the campaign constitutes both

an understanding of the case as a matter of national conscience, of the state as perpetrator, and of the victims as ‘survivors’, whose testimony is important for the nation’s ethical progress. The analysis thus also suggests how the rhetorical expression of recognition struggles that promote social justice must be understood in part through the “language of law” (White, 1985), whereby the persuasive potential rests not solely on the strength of the argument but also on the message’s ability to constitute collective identities and understandings.

Crucially, this campaign mobilization evolved as Ireland gradually shifted away from the imperious Catholic influence which defined the new republic’s early decades. That church-state relationship, and an inherently conservative ideology, would dominate Irish constitutional social values for decades: homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1993; divorce introduced in 1995; same-sex marriage legalized in 2015, and abortion in 2018. While these legislative landmarks may suggest a simplistic trajectory of liberalization, the struggles inherent in each should not be overlooked; instead, they remind us just how late, and how contested, these issues were well into the 21st century. Ultimately, while the 2010s may now look like a period of vast social change in which the Magdalene activists could be a natural beneficiary, resolution was never guaranteed.

In the following sections, we will first introduce the concepts that make up the framework for our analysis: primarily ‘recognition’, ‘constitutive rhetoric’, and ‘the language of law’. Secondly, we will give a more detailed description of the socio-political context of the campaign. We will then outline how the study was conducted, focusing on the premises for rhetorical criticism that guided our analysis, before finally turning to the analysis itself.

2 Mediated recognition

Mediators of social change

Recognition processes – whereby low-status groups gain recognition and worth (Lamont, 2018) – ultimately depend on stakeholders acting as mediators of social change. They do so, at least in part, through rhetorical means: by naming the offenses, demanding their rights, claiming their social esteem, and much more. As recognition cannot be forced but requires both concessions about the past and commitment to change, those who seek recognition will always first have to assert their right to rhetorical agency and confront the ‘others’.

This way, a struggle for recognition first implies a claim to be recognized as a voice that has the right to be heard. According to Düttmann (2000), all struggles

for recognition must be understood as the coming-to-be of a subject worthy of recognition: “Whenever an individual asks to be recognized, he asks for confirmation of what he believes himself to be. But he also asks for an establishing act that brings about what he will be once he has been recognized” (see introduction). This way, identity revaluation is always an ingrained part of struggles for recognition: Those striving for it seek social inclusion through validation of their identity, doing so from the position of this identity as if *already* validated. This makes clear how any attempt to describe the rhetorical features and functions of struggles for recognition cannot be limited to the actors’ more or less direct attempts to persuade each other about the correctness of one’s case, although this is one element. What is lost by such a strictly instrumental understanding of rhetoric is the way people call identities into existence through discourse.

Constitutive rhetoric

The way rhetorical practices shape collective identities that allow us to speak in a meaningful way about ‘we’ and ‘us’, either regarding society, particular group identities, or individual identities in relation to others, is treated as ‘constitutive rhetoric’. Although reflections on the constitutive nature of rhetoric can be traced back to the origins of the field (see Haskins, 2004), the term ‘constitutive rhetoric’ was coined by James Boyd White (1985) in his explorations of the communal capacities of forensic rhetoric. According to White: “[Rhetoric] is not merely an art of establishing probabilities or an art of persuasion but an art of constituting culture and community” (p. 37). It is through rhetorical practice that societies establish comprehensible relations and shared meanings; it is through rhetoric that we engage in “the making of the community that enables people to say ‘we’ about what they do and to claim consistent meanings for it” (White, 1985, p. 37).

A fuller description is found in White’s account of the nature of ‘the law’ not as a machine for social control but as a “system of constitutive rhetoric”, as:

... a set of resources for claiming, resisting, and declaring significance. It is a way of asking and responding to questions; of defining roles and positions from which, and voices with which, to speak; of creating and maintaining relations; of justifying and explaining action and inaction. It is one of the forms in which a culture lives and changes, drawing connections in special ways between past and present, near and far. (White, 1985, p. 205)

Recognition struggles encourage us to extend this conception of law as a rhetorical activity or, in White’s (1985) terms, “a language” (p. 205) beyond the courtroom; matters of recognition and misrecognition revolve, like the law, around questions of justice (for recognition and justice, see Honneth, 2004). Although

they progress within the political domain, many – if not all – struggles for recognition do not present themselves as matters resolvable through deliberations and the give-and-take of political compromise. Rather, they present themselves as matters of right and wrong. It is on these grounds that they define “a position from which, and a voice with which, to speak”.

The connection between recognition, constitutive rhetoric, and the language of law is, as we shall see, particularly apparent in the JFM campaign. Central to the campaign’s message is a resounding “j’accuse!” directed at the Irish state on behalf of a group of seemingly neglected and exploited citizens. In and through their media outputs, JFM constitutes themselves, their opponents, and their ‘case’ through the language of law. The constitutive functions afforded them by what we describe as a forensic argument is key to understanding the rhetoric of the JFM campaign.

Constitutive rhetoric in social movements

Although recognition is still an underdeveloped perspective in rhetorical theory (with some notable exceptions, see Burgess, 2015), descriptions of constitutive rhetoric in social movements that fall within the parameter of struggles for recognition thus give us an idea of what a ‘rhetoric of recognition’ looks like and how it can be approached.

In the American civil rights movement context, scholars have demonstrated how rhetoric is a way of constituting the self within a complex scene of situational contingencies and constraints and the presence of other actors. Commenting on Malcolm X’s autobiography, Benson (1974) suggests this constitutive rhetoric serves as a resource for “exercising control over self, others, and by extension, the scene” (p. 1). To acknowledge this generative function of rhetoric as parallel to the instrumental function is to draw attention to how the speaker or rhetor’s persona emerges through discourse. Building on this, Leff and Utley (2004) have analyzed Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’ as a constitutive text for King’s own character, pointing out that the repressed position of the civil rights movement’s rhetors “required rhetorical instruments sufficient not only to serve immediate political ends but also to constitute a new conception of themselves and their fellow African Americans” (p. 38). The voices of the civil rights movement demonstrate, with great clarity, how the rhetorical efforts at the heart of recognition struggles are not limited to attempts to persuade about particular political and social interests but also serve complex constitutive functions through which new identities and new understandings of the struggle and the state of the nation/society emerge.

This tension between the instrumental and the constitutive functions of rhetoric appears central in many, if not all, recognition struggles. Instrumentally, claims related to issues, and more or less successful reasons and arguments for such claims, are directed at those from whom recognition is sought. The credibility of the rhetor(s), as perceived by the audience, can then function as an instrument of persuasion, in line with traditional conceptions of rhetorical ethos (understood in line with Aristotle's trustworthiness and credibility of the speaker; Aristotle, 2020). Simultaneously, as reevaluation of identity is at the core of any recognition process, recognition claims will, almost by necessity, involve the constitution of a new public identity for the oppressed. The ethos of the rhetor then becomes an identity that those engaged in the struggle can mirror amid the reevaluation of their own identity.

National identity and moral purity

The historical Irish context is crucial when considering how the Magdalene story fits into the post-colonial landscape since independence from the UK in 1922. As Fischer (2016) explains, in the early decades of independence, the challenge felt by lawmakers was to “differentiate Irish identity from British identity, a task undertaken through recourse to the themes of purity, chastity, and virtue”, all “bolstered by Catholic social teaching” (p. 822). Drawing specifically on Magdalene laundries, she refers to the politics and mobilization of shame as a key force in the construction of “deviant others who were presented as threats to a new national identity of purity and moral virtue” (p. 832). As Gallen (2019) puts it, the Magdalene structures targeted women and girls “who shared economic dependence, poverty and social exclusion”, thus enabling Irish society (not just the state) to “isolate or deny those who failed to comply [with restrictive moral codes]” (p. 13). This gendered dimension is hugely important in understanding Irish socio-political history and the state's attitude toward women; Hobson (2015) describes how, more broadly, “Catholic nationalism and familialism were fused in the construction of the family” (p. 78) and codified in the Irish constitution in 1937. Women who did not fit these narrow visions of a wife, mother, and domestic servant were overlooked by the state in areas such as employment opportunities and welfare.

As important context, the JFM political campaign followed the 2009 publication of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse in Ireland (known as the Ryan report), which documented extensive institutional child abuse in reformatory and industrial schools primarily run by the Catholic church (Powell, Geoghegan, Scanlon, and Swirak, 2013). The Magdalene institutions were excluded from its

remit, yet the damning nature of the Ryan report's conclusions and related media coverage meant that the public was now sensitized to Catholic institutional abuse.

Magdalene women's personal experiences in these institutions have been formally recorded in oral history projects; O'Mahoney (2018) explains the recognition-based value of testimonies "given the relative cultural 'invisibility' of many of the survivors ... at the time of their incarceration (and often for decades afterward)". One exploration of Magdalene testimonies uses metaphor analysis to deconstruct how women made sense of their experiences (Benítez-Castro and Hildago-Tenorio, 2018). Along with images such as the container metaphor (e. g., their bodies as pain/anxiety receptacles) or the war metaphor (e. g., part of a regime, forces of aggression) was the idea of the laundries' 'cleansing' function, washing sins away. Elsewhere, Gott's (2021) analysis focuses on the 'productive work' notions within the women's testimonies, concluding that "modernity's obsession with productivity, and the moral meanings imbued within this, allowed the laundries to be viewed as sites of labor rather than sites of violence and trauma" (p. 187). Yet as discussed later, JFM – while of course fully aware of the harm within these institutions – would actually use this labor narrative and dues owed (rather than physical or psychological harm) as a primary means through which the state should be held accountable.

JFM campaign group

The JFM group was founded by three adoption rights activists in 2003, but their political campaign was renewed in 2009 with a core group of five volunteers (two original founders and three academics): They have described their motivations and experiences elsewhere (McGettrick, O'Donnell, O'Rourke, Smith, and Steed, 2021; O'Donnell, 2018; Smith, 2007) and are, of course, best-placed to articulate their own internal dynamics. As the campaign gained momentum in political arenas in 2009/2010, JFM acted as a collective voice and trusted source for journalists: "Members of the media increasingly turned to us for updates, context, and to fact-check their stories" (McGettrick et al., 2021, p. 59) and the campaigners sought to respond to any journalists' requests to "underscore that JFM was professional and responsive". JFM campaigners understood these core journalistic logics – they describe how they became familiar with asking "what's the line?" (McGettrick et al., 2021, p. 61), a reference to news angles. Yet JFM did not seek coverage at all costs: The Magdalene story centers on women's material experiences, but JFM resisted this particular logic and 'human-interest angle', acknowledged in the campaigners' 'Media Guidelines' document:

Over the years we have received repeated requests from journalists for survivors' contact details. Each time our answer has been 'no' ... survivors' stories are very personal and painful, and it is inappropriate to continue to use these testimonies in public for exploitative purposes.

These details explain some of the practical strategies underpinning their media relations, but the overarching rhetoric within the press releases is of key concern and provides the focus of this study's analysis, as outlined below.

3 Conducting the study

This study is based on a close-reading analysis of 57 public-facing press releases, published on JFM's website during its political campaign, which was active between 2009 and 2013 (it ended following the McAleese report, state apology, and commitment to a redress scheme, see Figure 1). These 57 documents are the complete set of press releases on the JFM website from this period, obtained via the Wayback Machine (Justice for Magdalenes, 2015), as the original website is no longer hosted (the newer jfmresearch.com website links to this archive).

Organizations' media-facing documents such as press releases can inform our understanding of struggles for recognition (Frey-Heger and Barrett, 2021) and provide insight into the strategies of those actors seeking to influence messaging around topics through social movement framing (Steidley and Colen, 2017). Press releases have also proven to be an intrinsic component in the professionalization of advocacy groups' information subsidy strategies (Waisbord, 2011) and in translating human-interest-based stories into media-friendly narratives (Wheatley, 2020). Furthermore, the JFM campaign gained momentum in the early social media era, at a time where the dominance of legacy media in Ireland was relatively unchallenged. Although not systematically recorded here in terms of impact on media coverage, it is reasonable to suggest that these press releases, therefore, had a potentially crucial role, reach, and influence at the time: an impact which may be somewhat diluted in the contemporary media landscape, given the role of social media and other digital platforms.

To give a coherent account of the JFM campaign rhetoric, we approach it through the rhetorical criticism lens (Black, 1978; Jasinski, 2001; Kuypers, 2009). We see it as the critic's task to explore and highlight qualities in the texts that provide deeper understandings of their overall rhetorical significance, providing theoretical descriptions, explanations, or evaluations. The product of this form of criticism is not an analysis that is reproducible in any strict scientific sense, but what Brockriede (1974) has deemed "an argument". We aim to highlight the

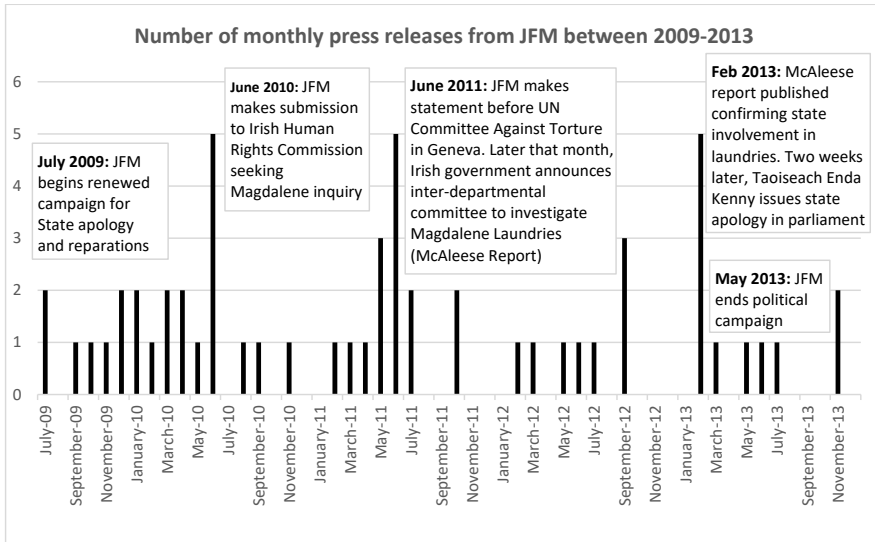


Figure 1: A timeline showing the number of press releases issued by JFM and the most significant events during JFM’s political campaign.

various communicative acts through which recognition is sought and expressed and how they function rhetorically as mediators of social change.

More specifically, our analytical approach is a form of ‘conceptually oriented criticism’, which James Jasinski describes as “back-and-forth tacking movement between text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously” (2001, p. 256). Rather than focusing on prevalence or generalizability, this form of criticism can “extend previous conceptual reflections into new discursive territory, thickening the concept and illuminating the practice along the way” (p. 257). This combination of theory and situated practice is particularly rewarding when probing multifaceted concepts such as ‘recognition’, ‘constitutive rhetoric’, and ‘law’, which comprise the basis of this analysis. As these theoretical concepts cannot easily be applied analytically, we introduce another conceptual framework better suited for such a purpose. The analysis itself is largely structured around the four *stasis* of forensic rhetoric: the classical account of the fundamental questions of contention in a legal process. The theory of *stasis* is not developed as an analytical framework but developed over time as a system to assist rhetors in identifying central issues in given controversies (Sloane, 2001, p. 767). It has primarily served as a tool for lawyers developing their argument, illustrating the rhetorical tradition’s close affiliation with jurisprudence; this proximity to legal discourse makes it well-suited to systemizing how the instru-

mental aspects of the ‘language of law’ are actualized in practical communication situations.

Although such an analytical approach is more subjective than systematic, the analysis used a four-step procedure to ensure internal validity and a certain degree of transparency in analytical assessments. The first step was to identify patterns and themes that appeared central for the texts’ persuasive and constitutive potentials. The second step concentrated on the instrumental rhetorical dimensions, probing the most prominent features of the campaign’s argumentative strategy. In line with the abductive analytical strategy outlined above – the “back-and-forth movement” between text and theoretical concepts –, the conceptual framework offered by the *stasis* tradition was utilized as a framework of analysis; what emerged is what we describe as the campaign’s ‘forensic rhetorical approach’. As we will demonstrate, the campaign presented its claim in a way that bears strong resemblance to this classical notion of lawyers’ handling of contentious questions in legal cases. In the third step, we focused on the constitutive functions via a systematic exploration of the textual features that are particularly relevant when trying to grasp how identities and issues are constituted (narratives, actors, relations, vocabulary, symbolic language, etc.). In the fourth step, we compiled insights from the previous steps to provide a cohesive assessment, thus synthesizing and illuminating the overall practical applications and their theoretical meaning.

The rhetorical analysis which follows has two main components: The first is based on the instrumental aspects of the campaign, analyzed via the four *stasis* of classical forensic rhetoric. As the JFM campaign’s argument largely follows this classical theory’s framework, a breakdown of the campaign into different *stasis* provides an insightful overview of how their argument is structured and unfolds. The analysis’ second part teases out constitutive elements, describing how the campaign offered Magdalene survivors a new identity grounded in the struggle.

4 Putting the state on trial: A forensic rhetorical approach

Turning first to the instrumental aspects of the JFM rhetoric, the most striking feature is how it steadily builds a judicial case against the Irish state. Through its numerous press releases, the campaign passed through the various *stasis* of classical forensic rhetoric, detailed below.

The facts

In the first stasis, *stasis coniectura*, the rhetor's task is to establish the case's facts. Particularly in the early stages, JFM concentrates on confirming that Irish judiciary representatives did, in fact, send young women to the laundries. This makes the state "an active agent in 'referring' many of these so-called 'voluntary' committals" (6/7/2009). The campaign also emphasizes an episode in which women who escaped a laundry were brought back by police, indicating that incarceration in the laundries was not only silently accepted but actively enforced by the state. In addition to presenting documentation regarding state collusion, JFM presents detailed reports on the documents received by officials. The campaign first gets admittance from the Department of Justice, which in turn is used to apply pressure on the education minister, who denied such facts:

In light of these revelations, JFM demands a retraction of the Minister for Education's assertion that the 'State did not refer individuals to Magdalene Laundries nor was it complicit in referring individuals to them'. (15/12/2009)

Following the logic of the *stasis coniectura*, the campaign is focused on getting the other party to accept the case's circumstances. At the same time, it is precisely the disagreement about these circumstances, and the incompatible responses of different state actors, that makes this clarification newsworthy.

In addition to establishing facts about state 'referrals', JFM argues that the women/girls were denied education in the laundries, focusing on the legal framework regarding Irish citizens' right to education.

[JFM contends] that all children in Magdalene laundries were Irish citizens. As such, the Constitution governed the State's obligation to ensure that they receive a 'certain minimum education' ... the State [had a] constitutional obligation to protect her. (7/9/2009)

Missed education might seem like a lesser offense compared with physical and mental abuse, but it is a circumstance that is easily accepted, can be documented, has potential financial consequences, and clearly falls within the state's remit. It is also a central argument in the gradual construction of a human rights case in which the state's unwillingness to safeguard citizens' rights becomes a key accusation. This way, rather than presenting incidents and actions that were particularly degrading, the campaign focuses on particular actions that determine how the state's role should be understood.

A crime?

The facts of the case established and admitted in this first stasis build a strong argument relating to the *stasis definitiva*. According to classical rhetoric, the rhetor's task here is to determine whether admitted actions fall under the "definition" of a crime. In the JFM material, the accusations against the Irish state focus on three elements: (i) the state's culpability in the misdeeds in the laundries, (ii) the state's failure to protect the citizens' legal rights; and (iii) attempts to deny culpability.

The definition of the state's actions as complicit in the abuses that took place within the laundries largely follows from the established and accepted facts. If court orders confine people, the laundries can rightfully be understood as penitentiaries, linking the state more closely to abuses occurring there. As the campaign asserts:

The State was an active agent in 'referring' many of these so-called 'voluntary' committals, and as such the State is complicit in and culpable for the abuses therein. (6/7/2009)

Furthermore, the campaign makes a point about how the state also failed to inspect the laundries, required for all penitentiaries. This way, the campaign doubles down on what functions as an accusation of wrongful imprisonment: Whether the legal and ethical validity of the court's actions can be sufficiently questioned or not, the "sentence" in any case represents a rights violation. If they were not penitentiaries, the court rulings' legitimacy should be questioned. If they were, the authorities failed to inspect them, thus sharing responsibility for activities within.

Defining the state's negligence as a failure to protect citizens' constitutional and human rights is evident from the start, underlined by the campaign's persistent portrayal of both past and present conflict as one between the Irish state and citizens. However, as the campaign progresses, the definitions of the abuses and the role of the authorities are sharpened. The most explicit, and most forceful, definition of the crime is given in JFM's specific accusations concerning the Irish Human Rights Commission inquiry (IHRC) (2010):

[We contend the] Laundries' daily routine amounted to servitude under the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. We also maintain that the abuse met the definition of forced or compulsory labor under the 1930 International Labor Organization Forced Labor Convention, which committed the State to criminally punish the perpetrators of slavery and forced labor and to eradicate such practices within the national territory. (9/11/2010)

Thus, after the state's culpability is established and after some concessions from authorities, the crime is finally defined in terms of forced labor and slavery. The wording adheres to the legally precise and relatively sober descriptions of international conventions, yet the term "slavery" has such strong negative connotations that it creates a rhetorical effect in itself; slavery connotes a stain not only on the slaveholders but on the society allowing it.

Although imprisonment and forced labor is the decisive crime, the campaign's rhetoric focuses on the state's attempts to deny culpability. Here, the campaign does not rely on applicable judicial definitions but establishes the definition of the "crime" in its own presentation. It also has a far more direct and aggressive tone, at least until the campaign gains footing and stronger political support in 2011. It is asserted that:

Ireland's political leadership responds to JFM's calls for justice with deliberate evasion and calculated obfuscation. (21/5/2010)

They are accused of making "empty gestures" and of meeting JFM with "polite acknowledgment and nothing more". Specific accusations are directed at incumbent ministers, but the accusation of evading moral responsibility is directed at the entire political establishment.

The motivation

As attempts to avoid responsibility are more closely linked to the present political leadership, it is also this "crime" that is in the focus in the *stasis qualitas*. Here, the issue is the motivation and possible justification and constitutes the core of JFM's case as a public campaign and in establishing a comprehensive narrative surrounding state responsibility. Throughout the campaign, JFM suggests two central motivations behind the state's actions, primarily pertaining to its attempts to deny culpability: (i) deference towards the Catholic Church and (ii) attempts to protect the state against financial and moral accountability.

Here, too, the attack is double-edged. On the one hand, it is strongly suggested that the state is hampered by its "deferent attitude" towards religious congregations. This is evidenced by state representatives' unwillingness to put pressure on the congregations to open their archives to better elucidate the extent of abuses. In the press releases, JFM repeatedly turns the politicians' rhetoric against them. One quotes the children's minister saying that "Irish people no longer show deference towards the Catholic Church", and JFM asks why, then, no one has been held accountable. They also quote the justice minister saying: "A collar will protect no

criminal”, then ask why so little is done to obtain the religious groups’ records. By contrasting words and deeds this way, the campaign strongly insinuates that the politicians really are reluctant to confront the Catholic Church’s symbolic power.

On the other hand, the state is accused of placing all responsibility on the congregations. Numerous times, JFM asserts that the government officials’ oppositions are direct attempts to protect themselves from liability and financial responsibility; for instance, when JFM exposes the justice minister’s attempt to clear his ministry of responsibility by suggesting the courts acted outside the ministry’s influence:

JFM recognizes this response as one motivated by limiting potential state liability rather than securing justice and redress for Magdalene survivors. (21/1/2010)

The same allegations are directed at the prime minister’s office:

The Taoiseach’s response signals the State’s primary concern is to limit liability [for compensation]. (28/4/2010)

Furthermore, state representatives are accused of presenting the history in a way that places the laundries outside the government sphere (i. e., institutions were ‘private’ and ‘voluntary’), thus maintaining a narrative of minor state involvement.

In various press releases, we are also presented with a refutation of possible justifications for the state’s misdeeds. Here, too, JFM applies an aggressive rhetorical strategy, particularly in the form of rhetorical questions suited for journalistic attention. The possible justification that emerges rests on a distance in time, and the practical challenge this presents in the form of incomplete archives and uncertain events. As such issues emerge, JFM presents them as questions of political accountability in and of themselves: that is,

Can Minister Coughlan demonstrate what became of the three children transferred into the Magdalene Laundries? Can she demonstrate conclusively the fate of each of the 261 children placed in laundries famous for exploitative and dangerous work conditions? Does she believe that such haphazard record-keeping with respect to the welfare of children is acceptable? (21/5/2010)

The refutation of possible justification is also done through counter-argumentation. That uncertainties related to historical events and archives absolve the present-day government of responsibility is refuted with reference to their unwillingness to make the religious congregations open their archives. Furthermore, the Magdalene laundries and the fate of the survivors were omitted from central inquiries in the truth and reconciliation work, such as the 2009 Ryan report. JFM

repeatedly mentions this and other omissions to emphasize how the government has shown little willingness to bring clarity to the laundries' history. In short, any mitigating circumstance resulting from a lack of historical insight is rejected by demonstrating that the government has shown no will to provide such insight. Thus, the refutation of possible justification also works to strengthen the suspicion of guilt, suggesting government has something to hide.

Due process

The final stasis, *stasis translation*, is where rhetors can object to the legal process or question whether the case is being tried in the right court. In classical forensic rhetoric, this is usually more relevant for the defense. By now it should be clear that JFM is not a defense case, but viewing JFM through this stasis brings some central rhetorical features to the fore.

As suggested, the campaign spends much time and many rhetorical resources in presenting a human rights case; what these women and children were subjected to is not Ireland's internal affair but should be brought before an international court. This is emphasized by the campaign publishing press releases primarily defining the case through human rights legislation. By introducing this legislation's definitions of "servitude", "forced and compulsory labor", "slavery", and so on, JFM is clearly stating which kind of court has legitimacy to provide resolution.

As to the other 'crime', the attempts to deny culpability, the campaign's strategy clearly suggests the Irish public as the proper tribunal. Although not stated explicitly, as the human rights violations were, this allegation is presented with a tone and style that speaks to the media's propensity to focus on conflict and accountability. Rather than simply providing journalists with a statement and text for reports, some press releases include what can be interpreted as question cues or prompts, potentially applying further pressure on the targets. A clear case in point:

Does Mr. Cowen believe that the State, and in particular the Department of Education, did not have a moral and Constitutional obligation to protect every child from the exploitative work conditions in the laundry institutions? (28/4/2010)

This strategy is used intermittently, but by including questions in such a way, rather than simply identifying issues and responses in passive language, campaigners may hope that journalists will interpret such question cues as unresolved and pursue responses, potentially further amplifying the media releases' impact.

Direct address, commentary, and labeling

Using the classical rhetorical stasis prism, we can reconstruct how JFM structures its case as a classical forensic argument. There are, however, other striking features of the rhetoric of the JFM campaign. First, the press releases contain extensive direct address; name and title, but never party affiliation, of governmental officials are consistently used. This underlines the legal tone of most material but also aligns with the general adaptation to the media logic, by enforcing conflict and questions of accountability.

Second, the occasional involvement of commentary from JFM's advisory committee functions as a very specific form of appeal to authority, typically as commentary on the importance of campaign milestones. An illustrative example is from committee member Dr. Katherine O'Donnell after the Irish Human Rights Commission calls for a statutory inquiry:

Irish citizens are daily asking – what kind of social values do we want, what kind of society do we want our children to inherit? ... [JFM asks this current government] to immediately apologize and begin the process of acknowledging and ultimately understanding our very recent dark history. (9/11/2010)

Such comments primarily provide context and establish the laundries' broader historical significance. As with O'Donnell's comment, these remarks appear to be speaking on behalf of the campaign while offering an external perspective that can either elevate the campaign's accomplishments beyond its immediate goals ("understanding our recent dark history") or indulge in an even harsher critical tone ("The government must move beyond its 'deny 'til they die' policy. Only then can they disprove one Magdalene survivor's telling observation: "They're hoping that in ten years we'll all be under the sod and they can relax").

Third, the press releases deal with labeling and categorization, both directly and indirectly. The clearest example of direct thematization of labeling is found when the education minister is called out for referring to the Magdalene survivors as "former employees" (28/9/2009). The minister's correction to "workers" is also disapproved, as it still invokes a work-life discourse. Similarly, the campaign repeatedly highlights the authorities' description of the laundries as "private" and "voluntary". Previous studies demonstrate how a discourse of penance both worked as psychologically oppressive within the laundries and gave them legitimacy to the outside world (Gott, 2013; McCarthy, 2010). This discourse, labeling the women and girls as "sinners" and "penitents" echoing the Mary Magdalene "fallen woman" archetype, is absent in the releases. It is, however, an important background for understanding how central labeling is regarding the parame-

ters of individual women and girls' agency, compared with the state as an active agent, or religious groups' control and responsibility. Instead, JFM referred to "survivors", a generic "women" and "children", or sometimes the more forceful "Irish citizens".

5 Constitutive transformation into a national campaign

The campaign sheds light on a central piece of Ireland's 'hidden history' but, more importantly, offers a clear and structured position on how Irish people can process and reconcile with the shadows of this history. It does so in part through a controlling metaphor of 'final reconciliation'. The need for an apology and redress is urgent because many survivors are soon to be, as one so vividly put it, 'in the sod'; JFM is a final push for justice. This does not only affect the survivors' motivation but has a fundamental impact on JFM as a struggle for recognition, emphasizing the symbolic value of financial redress as a token of recognition. The time limit makes the contemporary handling of history a political and judicial struggle rather than an academic inquiry, forcing political leadership to act rather than simply offer heartfelt but inconsequential expressions of recognition to historical victims. This central premise is foremost in JFM's rhetoric and sense of urgency. However, the old age and unresolved deeds of the survivors are never called upon to evoke compassion or pity; the campaign's 'audience' is never invited to identify with their current situation as an appeal to *pathos*. By the metaphor's logic, the campaign rather invites its 'audience' to identify with the survivors as equal citizens and members of the same Irish nation. The underlying message of the campaign – its claim to salience in the public domain – is that the Irish nation should make this right just as much for its own sake as for the survivors' sake, and it must be done now if it is to be done right.

This is particularly pertinent given the backdrop of the Irish economy's collapse in 2009–2010 and subsequent austerity measures, acknowledged in three press releases; one (ahead of a 2011 election) captures JFM's claim that there is a need to position their fight for recognition above and beyond material resources.

Though Ireland is undoubtedly at a time of unprecedented crisis, this general election must be about more than the economic situation. ... What kind of society do Irish people want? What role, if any, should the Catholic Church play in Irish politics and society? What values do we place on protecting the human rights of all citizens? What is our ongoing obligation (moral, political, and financial) towards survivors of past institutional abuse? (11/2/2011)

This appeals to a national identity, using the Magdalene case as a bellwether of the country's priorities, presenting the JFM objectives as something of an absolute superseding fiscal concerns. Through this, we can see how JFM aligns its interests with the general Irish public, and thus become *consubstantial* with it, to use Kenneth Burke's term (1969). In a Burkean understanding, consubstantiality describes the alignment of parties that makes rhetorical effect possible. It does not, however, necessitate alignment in every sense. On the contrary, such complete identification would render the need for rhetorical action obsolete. In the rhetoric of JFM, the Magdalene women represent a distinct experience distinguishing them from the rest of the Irish nation. In this distinction lies the need for rhetorical action and confrontation and thus the relation between the campaign's 'persona' and its audience whom it is trying to persuade.

Turning to those on whose behalf the campaign is fighting, we find that they, too, can find a basis for identification in the texts. The Magdalene women are rarely included in the 'persona' of the press releases. There is no 'we' assuming to speak on behalf of all the survivors; their individual experiences are barely included. Neither are they an obvious audience of the press releases. This lack of presence in texts, however, offers a model for a unified struggle for recognition, by grounding identification in the form of the struggle rather than the violations that precede it or the common identity these have induced.

6 Conclusion

We set out to understand the role that media genres and discourses played in transforming individual experiences into unified struggles for recognition by examining the forceful display of rhetorical agency in JFM's press releases. The group built its case by (i) establishing the facts around whether the women and girls were sent to the laundries by state agencies and whether they were educated or paid; (ii) determining whether a crime was committed by focusing on the state's culpability, its failure to protect the citizens' rights, and its denials of culpability; (iii) understanding potential motivations for these crimes (such as deference to the Catholic church, and fear of culpability); and (iv) presenting a human rights case, with journalists and the Irish public as invested actors. By waging a public trial against their own state apparatus, JFM insists on the equality that such a conflict presupposes, taking for granted that JFM represents those who can make political accusations. In this context, the campaign's unquestioned emphasis on citizenship becomes central as a reminder of the validity of the women's claims; its tone is resolute and uncompromising – not the voice of a silenced victim seeking

permission but a fierce prosecutor. Adding to this its alignment with public interests and consubstantiality with the Irish nation, survivors and their relatives can mirror the identity offered as grounds for a survivor-ethos based not on the nature of the offense but on the public good their struggle for recognition represents.

Future research directions for mediated recognition

By early 2022, the Irish state had paid €32.8 million to 814 Magdalene survivors (McGarry, 2022). Yet aside from the legislative ambitions and redress scheme, restoring dignity and esteem for survivors was an undercurrent in JFM's campaigning; this would manifest itself in a two-day event in Dublin in 2018 with the women at the center of media coverage. One attendee told broadcaster RTÉ: "[This event has] made a big difference ... As I said to my friends, we're clean. We're not in the gutter anymore. We're human beings." While this study explored JFM as the central site in this mediated recognition struggle, we acknowledge that strategies do not determine *actual* media narratives. Future content analysis research could strengthen understandings of mediated recognition and its manifestation in the journalistic arena by exploring whether news actors resist or embrace stakeholder arguments. Furthermore, while the case presented here draws on the Magdalene campaign's success, this does not suggest that redress is always the sole desired resolution, nor that redress is a guaranteed outcome if commitments made to recognition are effectively hollow, granted without any meaningful support towards marginalized groups. Moreover, some groups – such as Travellers in Ireland or Sami populations in Scandinavia – may establish formal recognition status from the state but struggle with complete social acceptance. Therefore, more case-driven analyses are needed to fully explore recognition's meaning – and what form it takes – for groups seeking acceptance whether through legislative arenas or among publics, and to help us understand the media forms through which these struggles develop.

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