Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

MICHAEL DAVID McDONALD

BA (University of Victoria, 2015)

“When the Government Apologizes: Understanding the Origins and
Implications of the Apology to LGBTQ2+ Communities in Canada”

Department of Political Science

Tuesday, August 13, 2019
10:00 A.M.
David Turpin Building
Room A357

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Matt James, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Colin Bennett, Department of Political Science, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Steve Garlick, Department of Sociology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Department of History, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

On November 28, 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized to LGBTQ2+ persons within Canada for the oppression and criminalization of queer sexuality and diverse gender identities. Between the 1950s to early 1990s, thousands of Canadian civil servants and military personnel were systematically surveilled, interrogated, and ultimately “purged” because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The federal government’s heterosexism criminalized queer bodies and sex and it enforced heteronormativity and cisnormativity. These policies had disastrous effects on trans and queer persons and have contributed to ongoing systemic discrimination against LGBTQ2+ persons today. The 2017 apology and the associated processes of redress have the potential to reconstitute the relationship between LGBTQ2+ communities and the government. Through an analysis of the apology’s affective and effective outcomes, this case study seeks to understand the origins, complexities, and implications of the apology for LGBTQ2+ equality and inclusion. It invokes Melissa Nobles’ membership theory to better understand the apology’s implications for LGBTQ2+ citizenship in Canada. Specifically, it is interested in better understanding the voices that were included in the pre-apology consultation process, and those that were not. Given the inherent diversity of LGBTQ2+ communities, such an effort had major implications for both the inclusivity of the apology and its ability to remedy past injustices. It finds that the consultations undertaken by the government were rushed, lacked transparency and openness, and consequently undermined the ameliorative potential of the apology.

It then turns to an assessment of the apology’s “authenticity” through an invocation of political scientist Matt James’ criteria, and posits that the 2017 apology is best categorized as a robust quasi-apology. This thesis then considers the reactions of LGBTQ2+ persons to the apology itself and finds that the apology may serve as a rhetorical tool, which can be taken up by activists to demand additional reform. Further, to have lasting significance the apology must be substantiated by real action. To contextualize the apology’s equality effects, this thesis also engages in an analysis of the government’s substantive policy undertakings and failures in the post-apology period. This thesis asserts that while the government has moved forward with some significant reforms, its post-apology policy approach is characterized by profound shortcomings that have fallen short of the broad-based reforms demanded by LGBTQ2+ activists. These government failures evidence the continued predominance of what Miriam
Smith terms “legal homophobia,” and the restrictive model of renegotiated citizenship the government has proffered. The citizenship lens invoked throughout this project leads to the theorization that there are two primary LGBTQ2+ factions with regard to the apology: one that seeks integration within the state and demands Canadian citizenship *in spite of* queerness and another that rejects the state’s homonationalist project and agitates for a *Queered citizenship* situated within an anti-oppressive, anti-racist framework. This thesis concludes by suggesting that the official apology can be used as a rhetorical tool to pursue the very *Queered citizenship* some activists desire.