

## Introduction

This article explores state apologies for crimes committed within the context of colonialism and considers their potential to enhance reconciliation between (former) coloniser and colonised. State apology is increasingly regarded as a significant component in post-conflict reconciliation,<sup>1</sup> with much of the literature sanguine about the potential for political apologies to help repair relations between erstwhile perpetrator and victim communities.<sup>2</sup> Where criticisms are offered, it is sometimes the assertion - more commonly found in the media than academia - that apologies are 'meaningless words'.<sup>3</sup> More frequently, there is a trend to point to particular case studies of state apology and decipher why aspects of the given apology are problematic.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a cluster of literature that establishes a framework for how a meaningful apology should look,<sup>5</sup> with criticism ensuing when examples fall short of such standards. What is interesting about much of this literature is that the authors do not have problems with apologies *per se*. If anything, there is a normative commitment to apology; it is just that there were shortcomings in particular cases.

This article makes the crucial intervention of positing that apologies from coloniser to colonised are not only problematic because they are sometimes done badly, although this is often the case. Rather, building on what may be broadly termed the 'postcolonial' literature on apologies,<sup>6</sup> it offers a more fundamental criticism: Colonial apologies are so often problematic because of their very structure; a structure predicated on the coloniser speaking and the colonised listening. They necessarily entail a Prime Minister/President or senior government member having an official capacity

and elevated platform (literally and figuratively) from which to speak, together with enormous media coverage. From this platform, a privilege of the colonising party is reproduced; the privilege of speaking, speaking for and representing. By the very format, the former coloniser is enabled a platform by which to craft a narrative and represent both the victim (the 'other') and the 'self'. The narrative of the transgression is again appropriated, fashioned and voiced by the colonising state. It is this format of the ritual that enables, invites, even induces, politicians to offer self-preserving, self-congratulatory and non-victim centred apologies. These problematic outcomes are situated within the work on speaking for and representing others as offered by Edward Said. The argument is illustrated through textual analysis of the 2002 Belgian apology for involvement in the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba (Prime Minister of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the 2015 Japanese apology to South Korea regarding the imperial army's use of 'Comfort Women'.<sup>7</sup>

The article is structured as follows: It commences by briefly exploring the recent proliferation of colonial apologies and highlighting the rationale for case-study selection. It next examines the sociological work on apologies and their structure as a narrative forming device. This is followed by an outline of the literature on representing others, with a focus on the work of Edward Said. Interrogating the implications of representing others, the article then turns to the empirical analysis. First, it dissects the consequences of the colonising state narrating the wrongdoing and crafting the plotline of the misdeed. Second, it analyses the power imbalances of the orator representing, framing and describing the colonised and, by extension, reconstituting their own self-image. Third, it explores the issue of the orator paternalistically determining what is

best for the victims in terms of their recovery. The conclusion points to the implications of the argument, both for further research and in terms of imagining future rituals of redress.

### **The emerging genre of colonial apologies**

As every work on political apologies faithfully notes, the 1990s onwards has been dubbed 'the age of apology'.<sup>8</sup> This has been characterised by an increased propensity and demand for public institutions and governments to offer contrition for past transgressions. Beyond the increased volume of public apologies, there has been a qualitative change: Where previously state apologies were usually immediate retractions of banal misdemeanours,<sup>9</sup> the post-Cold War era has seen governments apologise for severe human rights violations, many of which were perpetrated by previous generations within the context of colonialism. It must be said that this supposed outpouring of apology can be overstated: While the number of colonial crimes is innumerable, the number of governmental apologies is far more limited. Nevertheless, colonial settler societies, including the US, Australia and Canada have offered apologies for certain wrongs committed against indigenous peoples within their territories.<sup>10</sup> In terms of interstate colonial apologies, prominent examples include Italy apologising to Libya in 2008, the German Minister for Development offering a 2004 apology for the Herero Genocide in Namibia, Belgium's 2002 apology for the assassination of Lumumba,<sup>11</sup> and Japan offering a series of apologies in regards to its imperial past, the latest and arguably most robust being in 2015 in relation to the imperial army's use of Comfort Women in occupied Korea.

The nature of in-depth qualitative analysis precludes selection of all the above cases for analysis here. Case study selection has been guided by four concerns: 1. The decision was taken to analyse interstate colonial apologies as these cases are less studied than apologies in settler states, about which there is already a rich body of postcolonial critical literature (explored below). 2. Cases of interstate apology where colonialism has officially ended shed light on the implications of unequal speaking positions *after* formal colonialism. Such power dynamics are arguably subtler than settler-state cases, where colonialism still formally endures. 3. The Belgian case was chosen because it is specifically emblematic of the uneven speaking positions identified in a previous comparative analysis of four overseas colonial apologies (offered by Germany, Britain, Italy and Belgium).<sup>12</sup> As such, it serves as an exemplar of the dynamics identified in these cases of European post-colonial apologies. 4. The Japanese case was selected not only because it is a recent and timely apology (December 2015), but also because it functions as a comparative case relative to those cases exemplified by the Belgian apology. This non-European case study speaks to the pertinence of the argument beyond the parameters of a peculiarly European discourse on the colonial past.

While this article focuses on two case studies within a wider universe of cases, it is posited that the critique offered here has a strong capacity for generalisation to wider cases of colonial apology. As Trouillot writes, 'apologies can be read as rituals in the strictly anthropological sense of a regulated, stylized, routinized and repetitive performance'.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, as pre-prepared texts delivered in set-piece formats, there are limited discursive

parameters in which state apologies may operate, thereby inviting, as Derrida describes, 'automatic ritual' and 'mimicry' as part of the ceremony.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the central point of the article is that it is the in-built structure of colonial apologies that induces the outcomes. With this in mind, the article now turns first to exploring apology as a narrative producing format and, second, to examining the inherent structure of colonial apology.

### **Apology and narrative**

A number of sociological works explore interpersonal apology.<sup>15</sup> In essence, apologies are 'admissions of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event'.<sup>16</sup> Even from such a curt definition, one can deduce the narrative forming aspect of apology. That is, in admitting blameworthiness, there is necessarily an allusion to an event and how it unfolded.<sup>17</sup> Such admissions may contain detailed accounts of the wrongdoing or there may only be an implied cursory narrative. Nevertheless, whether implicit or detailed, the apology conveys a narrative about the past, impregnates it with a legible normative meaning and self-assigns degrees of responsibility for the misdeed. This narrative forming aspect of apology is even revealed in the word's etymology, with the Greek root *apologos* meaning story.<sup>18</sup>

For some, it is this narrative forming aspect that gives apology its capacity for fostering reconciliation. When a violent wrongdoing is committed, beyond the physical anguish, one of the most painful aspects is that the wrongdoer revealed insufficient respect for the dignity of the inflicted. By contrast, an apology, according to Smith, can recognise the victim as a 'moral

interlocutor' through the process of acknowledging what happened and shouldering blame.<sup>19</sup> From this perspective, with colonialism being inextricably steeped in narratives of superiority and inferiority, perhaps apology can be an important step in altering such toxic notions. In line with this, Augoustinos, Hastie and Wright argue that, in recognising historical 'facts' and successfully evoking emotionalised experiences of victims, apologies can create empathy for 'other' communities.<sup>20</sup> Andrieu contends that political apologies can 'affirm a common moral ground through which communities can be built discursively through processes of communication'.<sup>21</sup> Nobles argues that political apologies to indigenous communities can play an important role in ratifying subjugated groups' perceptions of the past, thereby altering national membership to bolster the aspirations of once marginalised communities.<sup>22</sup>

Certainly, there is literature that is critical of particular case studies of apology. It is frequently noted that certain apologies are inadequate; that they whitewash the transgression, pay insufficient attention to the victim and do not take legal or moral responsibility.<sup>23</sup> Yet, even in criticising a particular case study, there often remains a normative commitment to apology; a better apology would be more frank about the past, would take legal and moral responsibility, would commit to reparations, and so forth. There is even a vogue in the literature to establish a template for how an optimal apology should look.<sup>24</sup>

It is in turning to some of the broader postcolonial literature on apologies in colonial settler states that one finds more cutting critical analysis of the process of apology. In relation to Australia, Gooder and Jacobs as well as

Muldoon argue that apology is born out of a type of 'narcissism' and a desire to cleanse settler shame and guilt.<sup>25</sup> Ahmed examines how the 2008 Australian apology to the 'Stolen Generation'<sup>26</sup> functions as a form of discursive 'nation building'.<sup>27</sup> Muldoon and Schaap point to an irony of the apology operating as a 'nation-building project', in that the state agenda that led to the 'Stolen Generation' atrocity in the first place was the very desire to turn Aboriginal peoples into 'fellow Australians'.<sup>28</sup> In relation to a case study on Canada, Somani similarly finds that 'state apology functions as a tool for nation-making'.<sup>29</sup> Corntassel and Holder examine Truth Commissions and political apologies regarding indigenous peoples in four states, arguing that state led measures inevitably mean that state priorities ensure that reconciliatory processes 'fall short of offering meaningful avenues for rectifying ongoing injustices'.<sup>30</sup> Focusing on Canada, Coulthard positions the 2008 apology for the Indian residential school system as part of a broader practice of the "politics of recognition".<sup>31</sup> For Coulthard, it is the liberal practice of an apparent recognition of cultural and political autonomy within the larger confines of the settler state that recirculates the 'configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend'.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting that such critical literature pertains to settler state, as opposed to interstate, colonial apologies. This, I think, occurs for two overlapping reasons: First, unlike interstate cases where colonialism has formerly ended, the settler state still continues the daily process of nation-engineering and colonial consolidation. Second, as governments apologising to their own citizens (albeit ones marginalised within society) and, in the

process, ritually affirming the extension of citizenship and belonging to the settler state, there is a clearer co-option of indigenous people into the logic of the colonial enterprise. As such, insofar as the settler apology is a project of re-engineering the settler imagined community, this, in comparison to the interstate apology, can be said to be more flagrantly a *continuation* of the colonial project and an appropriation of indigenous people. In this sense, I would suggest that the findings of this article also pertain to settler state apologies and, indeed, may even be more pronounced in such contexts.

Focusing instead on interstate apology, this article builds on such literature. In doing so, it offers a fundamental critique of colonial apology - one intimated in the aforementioned critical literature, but not so clearly stated: Politicians do not whitewash the past or avoid legal responsibility because they are unaware of how to offer a good apology. One need not be a disciple of Machiavelli to understand that politicians and state actors are inclined to self-interest and veneration of both themselves and the state. Rather, it is contended that there is a structural problem with colonial apology: While it does entail accepting degrees of blame, the format enables politicians of the (former) colonising state an opportunity to exercise these inclinations towards self-interest and veneration. This argument is sustained by now putting the format under the microscope.

### **The format of political apologies**

Where Smith maintains that apology can make a 'moral interlocutor' of the victim,<sup>33</sup> this article, in regards to colonial apology, is more sceptical. Narrative, as already discussed, is a central aspect of apology and certainly such



narratives contain 'victims' and 'perpetrators'. But, in many senses, the victims are more bit-parts than primary protagonists. In other words, the victims become two-dimensional characters in a story told *by* someone else and principally *about* someone else. To state what is both obvious and yet frequently overlooked, apology is articulated by the transgressor and is inevitably designed to inform more about the transgressor than the victim. To draw on Erving Goffman, the apologisee is engaging in 'remedial work' regarding their tarnished public image. That is, a key function of apology is for the wrongdoer to engage in a public ritual to revitalise their own self-image in the eyes of others, in part through retelling the event and indicating that their 'true' self is dismayed the transgression.<sup>34</sup> In such a manner, one is left with the observation that apologies structurally and inescapably entail the wrongdoer speaking and the victim listening. The story will include the victims; it will say or imply what happened to them, but the story is primarily about and crafted by the orator. This asymmetric format of the offender speaking and the transgressor listening is accentuated in colonial apologies, where the speaker is already a high-profile political figure from a relatively wealthy state, has access to the levers of power, has a prestigious office, speaks into a microphone and has their voice routinely disseminated in the media. By contrast, the victims, often by dint of the violence committed upon their communities and their position in a world in which colonial inequalities and narratives still circulate, frequently remain marginalised and with a less audible voice.<sup>35</sup>

In apologising, then, the politician must both represent the colonised (the 'other') and, in the process, partake in their own image reconstruction.

Spanning feminism, queer and postcolonial theory, there is a host of important literature on the power imbalances and problematics of representing and speaking for others,<sup>36</sup> almost all of which could have served as a theoretical template for this article. Yet, arguably the most penetrating deconstruction of the colonial process of representing and speaking for others remains offered by Edward Said. In *Orientalism*, Said demonstrated that colonial subjugation was not merely a matter of physical violence, but one enabled by representation. That is, the colonial subject was/is represented in juxtaposition to the Occident; where the Orient is depicted as despotic, superstitious and disorderly, the Occident is just, scientific, orderly and so forth. This process of representation – the discursive constitution of colonised ‘other’ and imperial ‘self’ – enables and legitimises domination.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the theme of representation and narrative serves as the core basis of Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*. In Said’s words, ‘the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism’.<sup>38</sup>

This competition over the capacity to narrate pertains to both how the past is written and present political configurations. In Said’s words:

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions - about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities.<sup>39</sup>

In this extract, the starting point of *Culture and Imperialism*, we see key issues pertaining to colonial apologies: Notions of clarifying past contentious events;

ideas that past imperial wrongs continue to impact upon the present; the thorny process of assigning responsibility; and the present and impending political implications of emerging narratives of the past. Moreover, the issue of representation is 'not only in what is said but also in how it is said, by whom, where, and for whom'.<sup>40</sup> In other words, it matters that the coloniser speaks from an official capacity and that the coloniser's voice is more audible. It matters that the coloniser tells stories about the wrongs that occurred to other people. It matters that, in speaking about others' suffering, the coloniser still represents themselves as magnanimous and altruistic. Most of all, it matters that some have privileged access to the means of having their voice and narratives distributed. Turning to the empirical analysis of the Japanese and Belgian apologies, the article now proceeds to dissect the discursive implications of this privileged platform from which to speak.

### **Orating the coloniser's narrative**

An important implication of the apologising politician narrating events that occurred to another is that the orator has leeway to offer a plotline that is amenable to their interests; a director's cut, so to speak, with the potential (within limits) to emphasise or deemphasise certain episodes, employ caveats and utilise a vocabulary of their choosing. In particular, the orator has the capacity to articulate a more expedient and flattering or, at least, less damning plotline of their own actions.<sup>41</sup> This is compounded by the pre-prepared nature of such rituals, enabling politicians to consult with lawyers and advisers in meticulously forging a suitable script.<sup>42</sup>

Such sanitised narratives are present in both the Japanese and Belgian apologies. To start with the Japan case study: In line with previous Japanese apologies, the events for which the politicians offered contrition are narrated in highly ambiguous language.<sup>43</sup> In the numericised and rigorously structured Joint Statement between the Japanese and South Korean governments, it was Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida that spoke first and it was the first clause of the statement that affirmed what the apology was for, thereby offering a (limited) narrative of the transgression:<sup>44</sup>

The issue of comfort women, with an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time, was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women, and the Government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities from this perspective.

As Prime Minister of Japan, Prime Minister Abe expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.<sup>45</sup>

There is much to scrutinise here, both in terms of what is said and unsaid: Noticeably, it chimes with a text-book tactic of delimiting one's apology identified by Kampf as apologising 'for the outcome (and not the act)'.<sup>46</sup> In apologising only for the outcome (the 'affront to honor and dignity', 'the painful experiences' and 'physical and psychological wounds'), the Foreign Minister omits to include any details of the state's role in implementing the Comfort system. In this vein, the apology also falls short of a central criterion of Smith's notion of a 'categorical apology', namely that the transgressor should apologise for 'each individual wrong'.<sup>47</sup> With the focus on injuries, Japan circumvents narrating the specific wrongs of the comfort system, such as rape, detention

and kidnap. At the systematic level, it escapes introspection into, in Soh's words, the 'reinforcing convergence of sexism, classism, racism, colonialism, militarism, and capitalist imperialism' that enabled such a system of exploitation.<sup>48</sup>

Further aspects of the text contribute to the sanitised narrative: The subclause stating that the 'issue' of Comfort Women entailed the 'involvement of the Japanese military authorities' offers an ambiguous account of the role of the state and military in the system, leaving potential for an interpretation whereby the Japanese military was only incidentally entangled in the crimes. Equally, the noun 'involvement' negates the need to attach an active verb to capture the state's role in the system, such as 'organise', 'implement', 'orchestrate'. This rhetorical device is repeated by referring to 'women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences', with the sentence structure again eschewing an active verb that chronicles what the Japanese military and state did. Such ambiguity has important exculpatory legal implications because it enables a text where the Japanese state offers remorse, but is vague about actions which may be considered violations of international law. This was reinforced by Prime Minister Abe maintaining that the apology statement was not a recognition of war crimes or sexual slavery.<sup>49</sup>

Striking similarities can be found in the Belgian apology and the preceding enquiry into Lumumba's assassination. Like the Japan case, 'involvement' was a choice word in the Belgian apology, with Foreign Minister Louis Michel noting the 'involvement of Belgian government authorities when transferring Lumumba to Katanga [where he was killed]'.<sup>50</sup> Despite rigorous research detailing that 'it was Belgian advice, Belgian orders and finally Belgian

hands that killed Lumumba',<sup>51</sup> the apology was not for the actual execution. Rather, Michel stated that the apology was for the state's 'insensitive neutrality and apathy to the fate of Patrice Lumumba'.<sup>52</sup> Akin to the Japanese case, the term 'involvement' is ambiguous in terms of accepting legal responsibility and the narrative offered. Moreover, the apology being for insensitivity to Lumumba's wellbeing served to offer a narrative that reinforced paternalistic stances. That is, a narrative was offered whereby Belgium's foremost transgression was in its failure to meet its duty of care for an African person. The wrongdoing, from this perspective, was not the killing or a recognition that such violence was an outgrowth of colonial mentalities of superiority and racism.<sup>53</sup> Rather, through the apology, the government recirculated the notion that Belgium had a duty of protection to the colonised and it was the failure to live up to this that was the wrongdoing.

The official narrative of Lumumba's murder is given more detail in the Belgian state's enquiry into the event, the findings of which elicited the apology. The enquiry recorded that 'after a thorough analysis it is highly probable that Lumumba was executed in the jungle on 17 January 1961 between 9.40pm and 9.43pm'. It likewise affirmed that:

The execution occurred in the presence of Katangan ministers and was carried out by Katangan gendarmes or police officers, in the presence of a Belgian police commissioner and three Belgian officers who were under the authority, leadership and supervision of the Katangan authorities.<sup>54</sup>

Here, one sees the expedience of the colonising state narrating the events: First, the findings are, again, legally convenient. Second, and just as

importantly, the tone and scope of the narrative are established. As Bustin writes, such a text 'strikes a middle of the road, "adult" pose', reminiscent of settling 'an argument squabbling between children'.<sup>55</sup> It is through this sterile and officialised voice that a highly mechanical narrative of the assassination can be offered; the official narrative captures the time, place and immediate procedure of the killing, but omits the colonial context and imperial structures that facilitated it.

This, in large part, is an outcome of the scope of the official investigation into Lumumba's death. Established in the aftermath of the 2000 publication of De Witte's book *De Moord op Lumumba* [The Assassination of Lumumba],<sup>56</sup> the full enquiry was entitled 'Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry in Charge of Determining the Exact Circumstances of the Assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the Possible Involvement of Belgian Politicians', with the pre-established framework of solely investigating the years 1960-1961. In this way, the colonising state delimited what was to be investigated, ensuring that only the immediate events could be included in the findings. Consequently, the Belgian state narrative of Lumumba's death became isolated from the broader colonial context. In fact, the apologising politician, Louis Michel, outside the apology, vocally defended colonialism in the Congo, calling Leopold II 'a hero' and describing how 'the Belgians built railways, schools and hospitals and stimulated economic growth in Congo'.<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, both the Japanese and Belgian state apologies are offering degrees of remorse for past events. Yet, as demonstrated, the format of the coloniser speaking has offered an elevated platform for the metropole's politician to offer a narrative of the offence. In taking this opportunity, the

apologising politicians have used their voice to detail what happened to other people and, in doing so, have offered scripts that downplay the imperial process and offer ambiguous accounts of the wrongdoings that seem to meticulously circumvent legal responsibility. To underscore: It is not surprising that politicians operate in their self-interest. Conversely, the surprise would be if politicians were prepared to accept legal responsibility or unequivocally denounce the deep seated societal structures that enabled the transgression. The point is that, given the first mover advantage of offering apology and the format that enables a privileged opportunity to narrate, it is this structure that lends itself to such narratives.

### **Representing the 'other' and representing the 'self'**

To return to Said: The process of 'othering' entails not only representing the subaltern, but, in tandem, representing oneself. In portraying the 'other', one is simultaneously constructing one's own identity in binary opposition.<sup>58</sup> This is particularly important in apologies, where the text is ostensibly about events that were inflicted on another, yet the story is primarily about the orator's own identity. This is exhibited in both case studies, whereby the orators used the platform to represent the victims and, by turn, shine a light on their own values and constructed identities. This, as explored now, invites strong potential for problematic representations of victims and for the texts to be suffused with self-congratulatory sentiments.

The Japanese apology offers particularly problematic representations of the Comfort Women. As previously seen, the women are described as having 'suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds'. Such representations



reflect the recycling of gendered and misogynistic tropes.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, as some of the Comfort Women have testified, many have suffered life-long ailments as a result of their experiences.<sup>60</sup> The problem, however, of speaking of 'incurable' wounds is that the text imposes a permanence on each woman that they themselves may not all recognise. It speaks to the patriarchal myth that there is a normatively appropriate response to rape, implying that the survivor must inescapably be perpetually physically and emotionally defined by their experiences of sexual violence. In this sense, the statement negates the women's agency to choose for themselves whether to publicly talk of their physical and mental health or to detail how they were affected. It also assumes to curb the women's scope to recover and no longer be defined by the violence enacted upon them. Importantly, the incurable psychological wounds trope, by giving the impression that the survivors' mental tarnish renders them incapable of representing their own interests, fortifies the legitimacy of politicians speaking on their behalf.

The apology's motif of damaged 'honor and dignity' also reflects a sexist perspective.<sup>61</sup> Though vague, the phrase reproduces the patriarchal currency of female virginity and furthers the idea that a woman's esteem is defined in relation to the violence inflicted by men. Just as Orientalist depictions of the 'other' reveal more about the artist than the subject, here the gendered depictions of the Comfort Women illuminate the patriarchal values of the apologist. This is of particular significance where, in a patriarchal context, the 'dignity' of a woman operates to stand in for the dignity of men. Moreover, it is exactly this narrative of violated dignity and honour that has played such a significant role in socially marginalising and stigmatising women who have

been sexually assaulted.<sup>62</sup> In Abdulali's words in her essay *I was Wounded; My Honor Wasn't*, rape is:

Horrible because you are violated, you are scared, someone else takes control of your body and hurts you in the most intimate way. It is not horrible because you lose your "virtue." It is not horrible because your father and your brother are dishonored. I reject the notion that my virtue is located in my vagina'.<sup>63</sup>

The issue of dignity is discussed later in the Joint Statement text, but this time in relation to the Japanese government, with the text reading:

The Government of the ROK acknowledges the fact that the Government of Japan is concerned about the statue built in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul from the viewpoint of preventing any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity, and will strive to solve this issue<sup>64</sup>

In this way, a state apology for extreme sexual and human rights violations within the context of colonialism becomes an exercise in image and 'dignity' maintenance on behalf of the former colonising state. This is further compounded in the Joint Statement, with the agreement stating:

The Government of the ROK, together with the Government of Japan, will refrain from accusing or criticizing each other regarding this issue in the international community, including at the United Nations.<sup>65</sup>

In offering guilt, the apologising state is simultaneously representing/depicting the women and seeking to delimit others' capacity to represent the violating state in a negative light. Albeit arguably counter-productively, the apology is seeking to shut down public iconography (the statue) and diplomatic channels (the UN) where Japanese atrocities may be represented. This feeds into the

core argument of the article: In the privileged position from which she/he speaks, the apologising orator has an elevated platform from which to craft representations of others, manufacture a sense of self and attempt, as Said wrote, to 'block other narratives from forming and emerging'.<sup>66</sup>

The Belgian state's enquiry and apology regarding the Lumumba assassination also represent the 'other' and 'self' in ways that require unpacking. Compared to the Japanese apology, there are fewer overt representations of the colonised and more emphasis on the state and government's own image. In terms of direct representations of the colonised, while the enquiry delinks the assassination from colonial mentalities, it does, on the other hand, give a certain context. As well as citing the context of the Cold War, the report's conclusions evoke 'reports of tragic events of murder and rape [of Belgians], coming from refugees who had fled'.<sup>67</sup> These unsubstantiated reports of rape resemble the classic racist and colonial imagery whereby 'on the part of the Belgians, the ultimate fear and transgression seems to be the rape of a white woman by an African'.<sup>68</sup> There is an irony in this representation of the colonised, given that the imagery of the rape of white women is 'an unsubtle reversal of what had historically been the case'.<sup>69</sup>

In terms of representing the Belgian state, the apology and enquiry engaged in an array of self-congratulation. The foreign minister was especially effusive about the enquiry, using the apology to acclaim the 'reliability and quality of work' and celebrate its 'pleasing scientific, cultural, historical, [and] political contribution'.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the enquiry underscored its 'content related and historic-scientific work' and its 'scientific objectivity'.<sup>71</sup> Such language

generates the impression that when the Belgian state speaks it is articulating an impartial and 'scientific' truth, thereby bolstering the legal caveats within the narrative, while, at the same time, positioning the Belgian state as offering *the* definitive account of the assassination. In framing the colonising state narrative as the official account, it implicitly dislodges alternative narratives and fosters the pretence that Belgian involvement in Lumumba's death could only be verified by the colonising state itself.

In representing the Belgian state, Michel also uses the apology speech to cultivate the image of Belgium playing a benign role in Africa in regards to its 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign policy. In the apology, Michel commends Belgium on

an action program for regional stability in the Great Lakes region and in particular, for the Democratic Republic of Congo. [...] Moreover, our country has devoted its European presidency [of the Council of the European Union] to the theme of greater European attention and greater cooperation with the countries of this region. Currently, we are involved in diplomatic activities to ensure the success of the imminent inter-Congolese dialogue and resolution regarding the issue of militias and foreign troops on Congolese territory.<sup>72</sup>

Here, with the privileged opportunity to sculpt the narrative, the apology, ostensibly about the DRC and Lumumba, becomes, in part, a story about Belgium's supposedly progressive 21<sup>st</sup> century foreign policy ideals. Beyond illuminating the self-congratulatory dimensions of the apology, this had extra geo-political significance given the then government's ambition to play a more assertive role in Central Africa.<sup>73</sup>

### **The coloniser articulating the remedy**

In a characteristic passage in *Orientalism*, Said analyses a 1910 speech in which Arthur Balfour offered a classic defence of British rule of Egypt. Said dissects how Balfour not only presumed to speak for the West, but also to speak for the colonised. As Said writes, Balfour speaks for the subjugated 'in the sense that [he says] what they might have to say, were they to be asked and might they be able to answer';<sup>74</sup> he 'knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves'.<sup>75</sup> Such assumptions of the speaker comprehending what is best for the colonised echo in the two case studies. Having, in the preceding two sections, demonstrated it is the orator that narrates the events that occurred to the victims and diagnoses their ills, this section demonstrates that the speaker assumes to articulate the remedy. In other words, a predicament created by the privileged capacity to speak is that the perpetrator can paternalistically instruct on how the colonised can be cured.

In the Japanese apology there is a clear contradiction: On the one hand, the apology deems the women's ailments 'incurable', while, on the other, it talks of healing the women. Despite this, the foreign minister said:

The Government of Japan will now take measures to heal psychological wounds of all former comfort women through its budget. To be more specific, it has been decided that the Government of the ROK establish a foundation for the purpose of providing support for the former comfort women, that its funds be contributed by the Government of Japan as a one-time contribution through its budget, and that projects for recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women be carried out under the cooperation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the ROK.<sup>76</sup>

Several aspects of this passage require analysis: Stating that Japan will make a 'contribution' implies an act of generosity. The term 'contribution' is markedly different from 'reparations', which suggest the amends be made at the behest of the wronged. In this scenario, the Japanese government (in cooperation with the Korean government) deems it fit to decide what the money is to be spent on (i.e. 'recovering honor and dignity'). Thus, compounding the gendered language, there is the paternalistic dimension of the women not receiving the money and politicians dictating how the money will be used for their supposed benefit.

Additionally, the term 'contribution' implies that the colonising state, rather than the survivors, maintains the prerogative to determine when enough has been done to adequately atone for the past. That is, given the implication that the Japanese state contributes the money in an almost philanthropic manner, this implies that the money is not bound by legal or moral imperatives, but can be delimited at the Japanese government's direction. In other words, the coloniser maintains the capacity to claim the matter is concluded. In line with this, it is common in political apologies for orators to employ platitudes of 'closing chapters', 'putting the past behind us' and 'moving on'. Rather than platitude, the apology text is more explicit, saying that 'the Government of Japan confirms that this issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement, on the premise that the Government will steadily implement the measures specified'.<sup>77</sup> Here, then, the apologiser used the speech to determine what the 'contribution' was, how the survivors were to be cured and, finally, when the issue was 'resolved'.

It must be pointed out, however, that the official text declaring that the episode is resolved does not itself make it resolved. In the aftermath of the apology, even if not having access to the same means of having one's voice circulated, there have been clear critical responses in Korea from opposition political parties, civil society groups and surviving former Comfort Women. A key forum for this is the weekly Wednesday protests, where survivors, NGO representatives and sympathisers continue to gather outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Equally, two former Comfort Women, Lee Ok-sun and Kang Il-chul, travelled to Japan within a month of the apology and, speaking to reporters, eloquently challenged the tenets of the Joint Statement. Kang pointed to how 'it was agreed without consulting us'. Demanding a face-to-face apology, she noted that 'not only has Abe not apologised, but he hasn't even tried to meet us'.<sup>78</sup> Lee similarly lamented the lack of consultation, asking 'shouldn't there have been some explanation to us what the agreement was going to say and what shape it would take?'<sup>79</sup> Pointedly challenging the idea that the issue is irrevocably closed, Lee said 'there are still scars on my arms and legs from when I was cut with swords', adding 'can you tell me... not to protest to the Japanese government?'<sup>80</sup> Equally, the fact that Japan apologised to South Korea and not other Asian states where the Comfort system was implemented provoked demands from other states for apologies.<sup>81</sup> In this sense, though the apology does offer hegemonic narratives and emanates from privileged speaking positions, this hegemony is never complete and is subject to contestation.

Similar dynamics in terms of the colonising state advocating the remedy are found in the Belgium case study: The foreign minister used the apology

speech to declare that 'the Belgian government has decided to fund a Patrice Lumumba foundation of up to 3,750,000EUR, supplemented by a minimum annual amount of 500,000EUR'.<sup>82</sup> Like the Japanese case, the word 'decided' is significant because the money is framed as of the apologising speaker's volition. That the restitution is framed as the prerogative of the speaking politician enables the orator to both establish the extent of the funds and determine the projects on which such funds are to be spent. In terms of the extent of the funds, as Gibney writes, 'a price tag of U.S.\$3 million for assassinating a national and world leader of this talent and magnitude is itself intolerable'.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the money, the apology decreed, was to be spent on 'democratic development in Congo by financing projects for preventing conflicts, strengthening the rule of law and training young people'.<sup>84</sup> As such, in both case studies one can observe the implications of the privileged speaking position of the coloniser. Rather than remedies being on the terms of the aggrieved, the solutions are paternalistically framed by the orator on their own terms.

## **Conclusion**

Before turning to the conclusions, it is necessary to recognise an important limitation of this article. This article has pointed to how colonial apologies calcify the elevated narrative forming capacity of those already occupying a privileged speaking position. The quandary here is that, in analysing elite discourses and giving little attention to subaltern voices, there is a sense by which this article duplicates the problem it critiques. Said himself wrestled with the same problem, not least because *Orientalism* is about the West's representation of



the Orient and says next to nothing about how such narratives are resisted by the colonised. To be clear: The pre-designed purpose of this article has been specifically to scrutinise the narratives emanating from those with privileged speaking positions. The article has not endeavoured to speak for victims or engage in detail with victim discourses. Nevertheless, there is a gap in this article and the political apology literature more broadly, with more research needed on how apologies are responded to by affected communities.

Attempting to address this gap, Celermajer and Moses, in critiquing postcolonial perspectives, ask if apology is 'just more colonialism?'<sup>85</sup> In the colonial settler context, where formal occupation endures and state expressions of remorse are intimately tied up in the reimagining of the settler-nation and the appropriation of indigenous peoples into the polity, perhaps an argument can more reasonably be made for this. This article, however, has not claimed that international colonial political apologies are 'just more colonialism'. For one, such a conflation would be to diminish the sheer violence of colonialism. Second, it is important to recognise an ambiguity: Colonial apologies, for all their shortcomings, must offer degrees of remorse and renounce shameful events (even if sanitised) in ways that would be unlikely at the zenith of empire. Perhaps these concessions are why some have welcomed certain apologies. Yet, even if international colonial apologies are not 'just more colonialism', there are certainly strong resemblances, not least in terms of the paternalistic and Orientalist tropes this article has detailed. The key resemblance, however – the resemblance from which such tropes are induced – is the (former) coloniser's speaking position.

With the speaker's privilege, it might be hoped that the contrite politician would show deep introspection into the transgression, offer a detailed account of the wrong-doing, dissect and disavow the larger geo-political-colonial structures within which the offence was situated, and commit to programmes that radically overhaul enduring inequalities. This, I suggest, is a naïve hope. Inevitably falling short of such standards, apologies are then derided as being self-preserving, legally exculpatory, sanitising of the transgression and in the political and economic interests of the apologising actors. This article essentially agrees with such criticisms, but rather than suggesting new and 'better' apologies, it asks: Why should anyone be surprised? This article makes the vital intervention of maintaining that colonial apologies so often contain problematic narratives and representations because of their format. The inherent format of such apologies rests on the coloniser voicing a narrative, while the colonised remain less audible. In interpersonal apologies, it is comparatively straight forward to interject, accept or reject the apology. In colonial apologies, there is less hope of a subject-speaker relationship of equal interlocutors. The format demands that the speaker is one that represents the interests of the colonising state, has gravitas and political clout, is a well-known figure, speaks from a stage and has her/his voice disseminated in the media. By necessity, it involves the speaker engaging in remedial work as to their own (state's) character and telling a story about what happened to the colonised.

What does this mean for colonial apologies going forward? On the one hand, there remains a deep thirst for apologies among many previously colonised communities and it is certainly not up to this author to determine the avenues that such groups should pursue. Nevertheless, to spell out the

implications of this analysis: While an entirely understandable endeavour, it is suggested that pursuing apologies is not an effective strategy for addressing colonial injustice and its legacies. If apologies are to be pursued, this should be with full awareness of certain perils. First, despite the so called 'age of apology', colonial apologies are frequently not forthcoming; many campaigns encounter governments that obdurately deny or disregard their former crimes. Second, even if campaigns do elicit apologies within victims' lifetimes, the structure in which they are offered inevitably means that the statements are predisposed to the problems detailed in this article. The exact details, of course, will change from apology to apology; some will be more or less heartfelt, more or less eloquent, more or less legalistic. But they will be ineluctably given to the former coloniser narrating the subaltern's past, predisposed to saying what is wrong with the subaltern, and strongly inclined to detailing how the subaltern can be fixed.

Can there be a way out of this trap? Politicians rarely apologise purely of their own volition; they do so because of strong civil society pressures on them to do so. Just as politicians can be pressured into apologising, perhaps they can be pressured into adopting alternative, less comfortable rituals. Alternative rituals could focus less on the state-actor taking centre stage, less on the politician talking, and more on them listening to alternative voices. It is naïve to think that politicians will voluntarily give the stage and microphone over; it is unlikely they will voluntarily relinquish the privileged means of crafting narratives of the past. Instead, they need to be compelled to do so. This can only happen when lingering colonial narratives are radically ruptured in civil society. This article has suggested that the format of colonial apologies lends

itself more to maintaining hegemonic narratives and speaking positions than overturning them.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Barkan and Karn, *Taking Wrongs Seriously*; Celermajer, "Mere Ritual?"; Daase, et al., *Apology and Reconciliation*.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Nobles, *Politics of Official Apologies*; Andrieu, "Sorry for the Genocide"; Páez, "Official or Political Apologies"; Augoustinos, Hastie and Wright, "Apologising for Historical Injustice"; Murphy, "Apology, Recognition, and Reconciliation."

<sup>3</sup> Zhengyu, "National Apologies."

<sup>4</sup> For example, Barta, "Sorry, and not Sorry"; Gibney and Steiner, "Apology and the American"; Jamfa, "Germany Faces Colonial History"; Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*.

<sup>5</sup> Gill, "Moral Functions"; Smith, *I was Wrong*; Thompson, "Apology, Justice and Respect."

<sup>6</sup> This literature is explored below.

<sup>7</sup> To employ Soh's definition, "Comfort women" refers to tens of thousands of young women of various nationalities and social circumstances who became sexual laborers for the Japanese troops before and during World War II'. Soh, "Human Rights," 123.

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, "The Age of Apology."

<sup>9</sup> Lind, *Sorry States*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Nobles, *Politics of Official Apologies*.

<sup>11</sup> For a comparative analysis of overseas European colonial apologies, see Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Trouillot, "Abortive Rituals," 184.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Notably, Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, Lazare, *On Apology*; Smith, *I was Wrong*.

<sup>16</sup> Schlenker and Darby, "Apologies in Social Predicaments," 271.

<sup>17</sup> Terming the misdeed as an 'event' may itself be a misnomer. Wolfe famously termed settler colonialism 'a structure not an event'; Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, 2. Where Wolfe distinguishes between settler colonialism and other colonial formations, Sartre was more open to generalisation, saying 'colonialism is a system'; Sartre, "Colonialism is a System." In this sense, as Gibney among others has pointed out, apologising for supposedly discreet events or practices within the wider context of colonialism is to ignore the

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systemic features that enabled the misdeeds; Gibney, "Rethinking Our Sorrow."

<sup>18</sup> Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, *I was Wrong*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Augoustinos, Hastie and Wright, "Apologising for Historical Injustice."

<sup>21</sup> Andrieu, "Sorry for the Genocide," 22.

<sup>22</sup> Nobles, *Politics of Official Apologies*.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Barta, "Sorry, and not Sorry"; Gibney and Steiner, "Apology and the American"; Jamfa, "Germany Faces Colonial History"; Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*.

<sup>24</sup> For a critique of such literature, see MacLachlan "Political Apology."

<sup>25</sup> Gooder and Jacobs, "'On the Border'"; Muldoon, "A Reconciliation Most Desirable."

<sup>26</sup> The 'Stolen Generation' refers to Aboriginal children removed from their parents and community by the state and other agencies and placed in institutions or with white families.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Muldoon and Schaap, "Confounded by Recognition," 184.

<sup>29</sup> Somani, "Apology and its Aftermath," 12.

<sup>30</sup> Corntassel and Holder, "Who's Sorry Now?," 466.

<sup>31</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 106. The Indian residential school system was a series of boarding schools organised by government and church agencies for the purpose of assimilating indigenous children into white Christian culture. Like the 'Stolen Generation' in Australia, it involved removing indigenous children from their family and community.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *I was Wrong*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> Goffman, *Relations in Public*, 108-118.

<sup>35</sup> Colonial apologies thereby resemble Kampf and Löwenheim's model of the 'purification ritual' within their typology of public apologies. Kampf and Löwenheim, "Rituals of Apology."

<sup>36</sup> Key works include, Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"; Alcoff, "Speaking for Others"; hooks, *Black Looks*; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, *Representing the Other*; Adams, "Speaking for Others."

<sup>37</sup> Said, *Orientalism*. A case could be made that, given that this article analyses a Japanese state apology, it is amiss to draw on Said. This is because he principally dealt with Western representations of the Middle East. While Said rarely mentioned Japan, clearly the West has a tradition of utilising Orientalist discourses in representing Japan. Nevertheless, Japan plays an ambivalent role because, not only is the country subject to Orientalist representations, it is also, especially in its imperial role, a purveyor of similar representations regarding both the Middle East and the countries it colonised.

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For an analysis of Japan as both the object and purveyor of Orientalist representations, see Nishihara, "Said, Orientalism, and Japan."

<sup>38</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>41</sup> On the limits of politicians cultivating an entirely expedient narrative, see Schudson, *Watergate in American History*.

<sup>42</sup> Lazare, *On Apology*, 40; Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 40-1.

<sup>43</sup> It is widely recognised that previous Japanese state apologies have offered sanitised narratives of past transgressions. For key literature on previous apologies, see Park, "Comforting the Nation"; Yamazaki, *Japanese Apologies*; Lind, *Sorry States*.

<sup>44</sup> WSJ, "Full Text". The Japanese apology was offered in the form of a Joint Statement. Following Kishida's initial apology statement, Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se made a short statement, saying that 'The Government of the ROK values the GOJ's announcement' and confirming that 'the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly'. In this sense, the politician of the once colonised state is also accorded a platform from which to speak. Nevertheless, the surviving Comfort Women themselves were enabled no such platform and it is noteworthy that, with next to no consultation with the survivors, the South Korean Foreign Minister also assumed to speak *for* the women in declaring the issue 'resolved'. This article is specifically analysing the impact of the colonising state representing the women. A future article will analyse the implications of survivors having their own state paternalistically speak on their behalf in the apology process.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Kampf, "Public (Non-) Apologies," 2264.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *I was Wrong*, 221-223.

<sup>48</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, xiii.

<sup>49</sup> Panneerselvam and Puthanveedu, "6 Months Later."

<sup>50</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 50.

<sup>51</sup> De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, xxii.

<sup>52</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 50

<sup>53</sup> Gibney, "Rethinking Our Sorrow."

<sup>54</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "The Conclusions."

<sup>55</sup> Bustin, "Remembrance of Sins Past," 547.

<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Comfort Women apology, where there is a long standing civil society campaign in Korea for apology, the Belgian apology arose in the context of the controversy caused by De Witte's book, rather than a sustained civil society movement in the DRC.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Flandersnews.be, "King Leopold II."

<sup>58</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

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- <sup>59</sup> On the patriarchal aspects of Japan's previous apologies, see Park, "Comforting the Nation."
- <sup>60</sup> Park et al., "Korean Survivors."
- <sup>61</sup> 'Honor and dignity' has been used as a stock phrase in numerous previous official statements and apologies in relation to Comfort Women. The gendered and patriarchal aspects of such discourses are also analysed by Park, "Comforting the Nation."
- <sup>62</sup> For a discussion on this, see Enloe, *Bananas Beaches and Bases*, 58.
- <sup>63</sup> Abdulali, "I was Wounded"; Enloe also refers to this article, Enloe, *Bananas Beaches and Bases*, 58.
- <sup>64</sup> WSJ, "Full Text."
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.
- <sup>67</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "The Conclusions."
- <sup>68</sup> Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization*, 182.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 181.
- <sup>70</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 52.
- <sup>71</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Summary of the Activities."
- <sup>72</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 52.
- <sup>73</sup> On the apology's intersection with Belgium's geopolitical objectives, see Kerstens, "Original Sin," 191-193.
- <sup>74</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 34.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>76</sup> WSJ, "Full Text."
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Quoted in McCurry, "South Korea Warns Japan." It may be that one could envisage such face-face meetings and private apologies overcoming some of the inherent hierarchical features of public apology. Such an avenue requires further research.
- <sup>79</sup> AFP, "Former Korean Sex Slave."
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>81</sup> Xinhuanet, "China Voice."
- <sup>82</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 52.
- <sup>83</sup> Gibney, "Rethinking our Sorrow," 281.
- <sup>84</sup> Chambre des Représentants, "Compte Rendu Intégral," 52.
- <sup>85</sup> Celermajer and Moses, "Australian Memory," 49.

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