

# The sorrow of empire: Rituals of legitimation and the performative contradictions of liberalism

TOM BENTLEY\*

**Abstract.** Unexpectedly, several prominent European countries have begun to issue official state apologies to their former colonies. What does this proliferation of official colonial sorrow from such countries as Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Britain reveal about the normative tenets of the contemporary international order? This article analyses colonial apologies as crucial symbolic and ritualistic sites where state elites project liberal credentials and affirm liberal normative tenets in the international system. Specifically, the article demonstrates how these apologies for colonial atrocity appear to reinforce liberal conceptions of human rights, the renunciation of violence, cordial relations with formerly colonised states, and commitments to state accountability and transparency. Yet, textual analysis of several state apologies reveals that these performatives simultaneously contradict each of these liberal tenets. It finds that – even in apology – political elites reflect ambivalence about certain human rights violations; persist in glorifying or sanitising the violent colonial past; recycle paternalistic and hierarchical discourses and policies towards the apology’s recipients; and offer contradictory notions of the state’s historical responsibility. In exposing these performative contradictions of empirical sorrow, the article seeks to expand the discipline’s understandings of, and dilemmas within, a key performative and ritualistic legitimation strategy whereby liberalism reproduces itself in the international system.

**Tom Bentley** is Teaching Fellow at the University of Aberdeen. His forthcoming book *Empires of Remorse: Memory, Postcolonialism and Apologies for Colonial Atrocity* is to be published by Routledge in late 2015 or early 2016.

While the scholar of international politics may be drawn to any number of foreign policy statements, there is something particularly intriguing about the emerging twenty-first century phenomenon of states offering international apologies for their colonial transgressions. Such apologies speak simultaneously to many of the discipline of International Relations’ (IR) most enduring preoccupations: International violence, the legacies of empire, postconflict resolution, North-South relations and international diplomacy, to name just a few. Literature on state apologies has expanded in recent years,<sup>1</sup> primarily analysing such issues as dispute resolution and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: Norton, 2000); Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn (eds), *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Roy L. Brooks (ed.), *When Sorry isn’t Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York:

reconciliation,<sup>2</sup> questions of reparations,<sup>3</sup> and forgiveness and transgenerational (in)justice.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite this flurry, it remains surprising that there is no systematic analysis of international colonial apologies. One contribution of this work is to offer a first step in filling this lacuna.

The second – and more important – contribution is born out of sociologist Nicolas Tavuchis's speculation that apologies have the capacity to illuminate the 'normative principles' that permeate social life;<sup>5</sup> they are offered when a social norm is transgressed and resonate with and reflect society's overt and tacit moral code. Applying this to *the international*, state apologies serve as fascinating and delicately poised sites of analysis for the IR scholar; they function as crucial rituals where the normative principles of international politics are negotiated, disseminated, and brought into sharper focus. Taking four empirical case studies of apologies from Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Britain, this article addresses the question: What do international colonial apologies inform us about the normative tenets of the contemporary international order?

Though the explicit question of international apology and its normative implications is novel in the literature, where it is touched upon there tends to be an equation of apologies with liberalism.<sup>6</sup> And this is not without good reason; indeed, this article demonstrates that apologies, at first glance, appear to reinforce key liberal tenets: They accentuate adherence to contemporary human rights regimes, publically condemn episodes of violence, emphasise more cordial and equal relationships with

New York University Press, 1999); Danielle Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Michael Cunningham, 'Saying sorry: The politics of apology', *The Political Quarterly*, 70:3 (1999), pp. 285–93; Michael Cunningham, 'Apologies in Irish politics: A commentary and critique', *Contemporary British History*, 18:4 (2004), pp. 80–92; Mark Gibney, 'Rethinking our sorrow', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 14:3 (2002), pp. 279–83; Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner (eds), *The Age of Apology: Facing up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Mark Gibney and Erik Roxstrom, 'The status of state apologies', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23:4 (2001), pp. 911–39; Zohar Kampf and Nava Löwenheim, 'Rituals of apology in the global arena', *Security Dialogue*, 43:1 (2012), pp. 43–60; Jennifer M. Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 'Abortive rituals: Historical apologies in the global era', *Interventions*, 2:2 (2000), pp. 171–86.

<sup>2</sup> Kora Andrieu, "'Sorry for the genocide': How public apologies can help promote national reconciliation", *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 38:3 (2009), pp. 3–23; Raymond Cohen, 'Apology and reconciliation in International Relations', in Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (ed.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 177–96; Jason A. Edwards, 'Community-focused apology in international affairs: Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's apology', *Howard Journal of Communications*, 16 (2005), pp. 317–36; Kampf and Löwenheim, 'Rituals of apology'; Robert Weyeneth, 'The power of apology and the process of historical reconciliation', *The Public Historian*, 23:3 (2001), pp. 9–38.

<sup>3</sup> Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*; Brooks (ed.), *When Sorry isn't Enough*; Glen Pettigrove, 'Apology, reparations, and the question of inherited guilt', *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 17:4 (2003), pp. 319–48.

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Marrus, 'Official apologies and the quest for historical justice', *Journal of Human Rights*, 6:1 (2007), pp. 75–105; Janna Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice* (Oxford: Polity, 2002); Janna Thompson, 'Apology, justice and respect: A critical defense of political apology', in Gibney et al. (eds), *Age of Apology*, pp. 31–44; Janna Thompson, 'Apology, historical obligations and the ethics of memory', *Memory Studies*, 2:2 (2009), pp. 195–210.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: a Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Freeman, 'Historical injustice and liberal political theory', in Gibney et al. (eds), *Age of Apology*, pp. 45–60; Mihaela Mihai, 'When the state says "sorry": State apologies as exemplary political judgments', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 21:2 (2013), pp. 200–20. For a nuanced discussion on 'liberal-humanistic public guilt', see Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, pp. 314–17.

formerly colonised states/peoples, and demonstrate transparency and accountability for the state's actions. However, in engaging in textual analysis of the primary apology texts, analysing entwined policy documents and concurrent governmental discourse, the article argues that on each of these points there are significant aspects of colonial *mea culpa* that contradict the normative underpinnings of liberalism. In particular, the article reveals ways in which – even at the moment of apology – political elites (i) reflect ambivalence about certain human rights violations; (ii) persist in glorifying or sanitising aspects of the violent colonial past; (iii) recycle paternalistic and hierarchical discourses and policies towards the apology's recipients; and (iv) offer disjointed and contradictory notions of the liberal polity's historical responsibility. In making this argument, the goal here is wider than simply expressing something interesting about apology: It is to speak to a crucial symbolic, ceremonial, and discursive manner by which liberalism and its normative and performative dimensions are disseminated and reproduced in the international system. It is to point to thorny disjunctures and contradictions that pertain to broader anxieties within the liberal turn in international politics.

The article commences by establishing the cases to be analysed, stipulating the parameters by which they have been selected and outlining the research techniques employed. The article next discusses the social functions of apology, its potential as a barometer of normative tenets and establishes what, for the purposes of this article, is meant by liberalism. The subsequent sections proceed to consider and problematise in detail each of the key tenets of liberalism that the apologies seem to endorse: It first points to the dilemma that, whereas liberalism emphasises universal human rights, apologies address only narrow violations, while eschewing others. It then proceeds to trace processes where, even in condemning particular atrocities, liberal states continue to revere or sanitise aspects of the wider colonial past in ways that are incompatible with the apparent condemnation of arbitrary violence. The following section explores processes through which, rather than ushering in new more egalitarian and cordial global relations (as liberal cosmopolitanism/internationalism promotes), the apologies are replete with discourses and attached to policies that reproduce and entrench existing hierarchical and paternalistic geopolitical relations. The final section examines the idea that such intergenerational apologies contradict central liberal notions of individual and state responsibility and, though seemingly professing historical accountability and clarity, deliver obfuscation or evasion on the matter.

### **Case studies of colonial *mea culpa* in 'the age of apology'**

The article analyses four prominent examples of international apologies from European governments for transgressions committed in their (former) colonies: The 2002 Belgium apology for involvement in the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba, prime minister of current day Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); the 2004 German apology offered at the centenary of the start of the Herero and Namaqua Genocide in current day Namibia; the 2008 Italian apology for colonialism in Libya; and the 2010 British apology for the 1972 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of Civil Rights protesters in Derry, Northern Ireland. These cases have been selected because they

constitute state apologies by members of the government for colonial transgressions committed overseas.<sup>7</sup>

The implications of this selection criteria need to be further discussed, not least because, in the so-called ‘age of apology’,<sup>8</sup> these cases may be situated within a larger collection of similar expressions. The specific cases are selected because they constitute clear offers of apology,<sup>9</sup> rather than mere expressions of remorse or regret. Thus, such examples as Bill Clinton’s remorseful expressions regarding slavery and Tony Blair’s for the Irish Potato Famine are not analysed here. It should equally be noted that domestic apologies to indigenous peoples in European colonial settler states, such as Australia, the US, and Canada are not analysed. The rationale for this is twofold: Firstly, there is a wider extant literature on domestic apologies to indigenous peoples, especially the Australian case.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the analysis of overseas apologies more succinctly locates the article in the discipline of IR and more concretely illustrates the international normative tenets exhibited in the rituals. It can also be noted that non-European countries, most noticeably Japan, have also engaged in empire building and extreme violence before offering subsequent apologies. Owing to a desire to follow the postcolonial project of locating and deciphering the European discourses of empire,<sup>11</sup> non-European apologies are not analysed here. Thus, given this set of criteria, it is the four above-mentioned case studies that have been identified as the case studies for this article. While the given British, German, Belgian, and Italian case studies constitute the core examples of governmental international colonial *mea culpa* to date, it should nevertheless be recognised that, within an epoch when historical remorse is becoming more common, there is room in future articles for an analysis of the wider politics of regret and its normative implications, encompassing settler states, non-European states and refusals to apologise.

Analysing these cases, the article undertakes analysis of the primary textual apologies and critically examines the normative commitments encompassed within them. Equally, given that the apologies frequently come directly attached with economic and political agreements, these too are scrutinised. For example, the Belgian apology was directly attached to the *Patrice Lumumba Foundation*, while the Italian apology outlined ‘reparations’ in the adjacent *Treaty of Friendship and Reconciliation*. Analysis of these agreements is undertaken to further illuminate the ways apology interacts with policies that advance particular relationships *vis-à-vis* the former

<sup>7</sup> In 2011, the Dutch ambassador to Indonesia Tjeerd de Zwann apologised for the 1947 massacre in the village of Rawagede. This case has not been included on the grounds that it was not offered by a member of the government.

<sup>8</sup> Roy L. Brooks, ‘The age of apology’, in Brooks (ed.), *When Sorry isn’t Enough*, pp. 3–11.

<sup>9</sup> The definition of what constitutes an apology is contested. However, each apology text employs the verb ‘apologise’, noun ‘apology’, or plural ‘apologies’. The German case is the most tenuous here, with the apologising minister clarifying that ‘everything I have said was an apology from the German government’. Quoted in Andrew Meldrum, ‘German minister says sorry for genocide in Namibia’, *The Guardian* (16 August 2004), available at: {<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/16/germany.andrewmeldrum>} accessed 10 June 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Among the many works on Australian apology, see Daniella Celermajer, ‘The apology in Australia: Re-covenanting the national imaginary’, in Barkan and Karn (eds), *Taking Wrongs Seriously*, pp. 153–84; Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs, ‘“On the border of the unsayable”: The apology in postcolonializing Australia’, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2:2 (2001), pp. 229–47; John Morton, ‘Abortive redemption? Apology, history and subjectivity in Australian reconciliation’, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 112:3 (2003), pp. 238–59.

<sup>11</sup> This is most clearly exemplified by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

colony. Moreover, in recognising that apologies are neither ‘standalone texts’,<sup>12</sup> nor isolated from larger societal processes, governmental discourses and ideational frameworks, the article analyses the contrite states’ wider efforts in narrative formation in respect to the transgressions and their normative implications in the present. To use an analogy: A misbehaving schoolchild is not solely judged by the eloquence of the apology; if he then regales friends with stories of his misdeeds and continues the same behaviour, then this reflects upon the apology in a different light than if he demonstrates remorse and changes behaviour. Similarly, such analysis of conjoined treaties and concurrent governmental/state representations of the colonial past are significant here because they inform the meaning, context, and political and discursive landscape in which the apology is embedded.

It is also necessary to be clear about the scope of the article: This article is an analysis of metropolitan European politicians’ contrition for the colonial past and about what this reveals about the normative tenets of the international order. In this respect, the article does not seek to substantially analyse the ways in which (formerly) colonised peoples responded to the apologies or whether they were satisfied or unsatisfied with the contrition. The implications of this and the arising avenues for future research are discussed at the end of the article.

### Apology rituals and liberalism

In his seminal work *Relations in Public*, sociologist Erving Goffman positioned apologies as a type of ‘remedial work’.<sup>13</sup> That is, they can be utilised as a tool to repair one’s tarnished social standing following a violation of a social rule. They are a type of ritual that publically castigates the offending deed and thus attempts to distance oneself from the aspect of one’s character that committed the misdeed.<sup>14</sup> In Goffman’s words, ‘an apology is a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, for Tavuchis, it calls ‘attention to what we may *be* as well as what we have done’.<sup>16</sup> In this way, in these rituals states discursively engage in identity formation, establish parameters of what is perceived as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, negotiate the tacit rules of the international landscape, and project the values that they wish to be associated with. Thus, in these necessarily public performances, conceivably with more clarity than other foreign policy statements, observers of state apologies can glean powerful insights into the normative tenets of the international landscape.<sup>17</sup> And in the texts of the apologies there is an adeptness at highly normative – even utopian – language: Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, for instance, spoke in his apology to Libya of ‘spread[ing] peace in the world’ and ‘well-being to man, . . . friendship,

<sup>12</sup> Jane W. Yamazaki, ‘Crafting the apology: Japanese apologies to South Korea in 1990’, *Asian Journal of Communication*, 14:2 (2004), p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (London: Allen Lane, 1971), pp. 108–14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, p. 9, emphasis in original.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that other foreign policy statements are not important in analysing the normative tenets of the international system or that they cannot be analysed in conjunction with apologies.

brotherhood and love'.<sup>18</sup> The German apology for the Herero Genocide articulated a normative objective of 'a more just, peaceful and more humane world' and 'a vision of freedom, justice, mutual respect and human rights',<sup>19</sup> while the British apology for Bloody Sunday asserted the desire to 'build a stable, peaceful, prosperous and shared future'.<sup>20</sup>

If we are to make sense of such normative proclamations and position them alongside liberalism, it is necessary to offer parameters of what can be understood by this concept. Liberalism, along with realism – especially in the context of the so-called 'First Great Debate',<sup>21</sup> the 'Neo-Neo Debate',<sup>22</sup> liberal cosmopolitanism,<sup>23</sup> and the Democratic Peace Theory,<sup>24</sup> is one of the most central, analysed, and poured over paradigms in IR.<sup>25</sup> It is, of course, a diverse and notoriously difficult concept to pin down, thereby eluding a 'readily available' definition.<sup>26</sup> Clearly there are different strands of contemporary liberalism, ranging from neoconservatism and neoliberalism, through to more communal and social democratic varieties. Attempting to offer a full overview of the concept and its intellectual heritage of Kant, Locke, Mill, and so on is beyond the scope and, moreover, not the point of this article. Indeed, in the ritualistic and performative aspects of *mea culpa*, it is not the tomes of the great liberal thinkers that elites are positioning themselves amidst. Rather, this article locates four central tenets of liberalism that are (problematically) exhibited in the apologies: (i) commitment to human rights regimes; (ii) renunciation of egregious violence; (iii) commitments to more equal and cordial relations with other states/communities, especially former colonies; (iv) commitments to transparency and accountability in regards to state actions. The article now proceeds to consider these key features in turn in more detail, examining the ways in which they are emphasised within apology rituals and scrutinising the dualities and contradictions within them.

<sup>18</sup> Silvio Berlusconi, 'Sintesi dell'intervento del Presidente del Consiglio, Silvio Berlusconi, alla firma del Trattato di amicizia, partenariato e cooperazione tra Italia e Libia', *Governo italiano: Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri* (30 August 2008), available at: {[http://www.governo.it/presidente/interventi/testo\\_int.asp?d=40139](http://www.governo.it/presidente/interventi/testo_int.asp?d=40139)} accessed 1 September 2013. All translations are the author's own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>19</sup> Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, 'Speech by Federal Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul at the Commemorations of the 100th Anniversary of the Suppression of the Herero uprising', Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Windhoek, 14 August 2004, available at: {[http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/Vertretung/windhuk/en/03/Commemorative\\_Years\\_2004\\_2005/Seite\\_Speech\\_2004-08-14\\_BMZ.html](http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/Vertretung/windhuk/en/03/Commemorative_Years_2004_2005/Seite_Speech_2004-08-14_BMZ.html)} accessed 16 January 2014.

<sup>20</sup> David Cameron, 'Bloody Sunday: PM David Cameron's full statement', *BBC News* (15 June 2010), available at: {<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10322295>} accessed 16 January 2014.

<sup>21</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939; An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan and co., 1940); Woodrow Wilson, 'The coming age of peace', in Evan Luard (ed.), *Basic Texts in International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 267–71.

<sup>22</sup> David A. Baldwin (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> David Held, 'Cosmopolitanism: Globalisation tamed?', *Review of International Studies*, 29:4 (2003), pp. 465–80; David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010); Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Michael W. Doyle, 'Liberalism and world politics', *American Political Science Review*, 80:4 (1986), pp. 1151–69; Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> See Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism: Theory, History, Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



## Universal human rights and the dilemma of limited apologies

Perhaps the cornerstone of liberalism and the key tenet that apologies appear to endorse is support for human rights. Since the 1990s and the end of the Cold War, it has been increasingly important for states to, at least on a symbolic level, adhere to liberal discourses of human rights.<sup>27</sup> Failure to comply with human rights norms leads to stigmatisation and deficiencies in international legitimacy, with violating states ‘now routinely denounced as “pariahs”, squarely positioned outside the company of “civilized states”’.<sup>28</sup> Even beyond this, the post-Cold War landscape has heralded a phenomenon that Fassin calls ‘humanitarian government’, whereby, unlike the conventional tenets of realism, it is necessary to couch one’s identity, legitimacy, and policies within ‘moral sentiments’.<sup>29</sup> At the heart of this, it is ‘the dominated’ and persecuted that have become the focal points for such sentiments.<sup>30</sup> In this normative climate, rhetorical adherence to supposed ethical foreign policies, norms of human rights and the dignity of others, even those far afield, have become central touchstones in processes of state legitimation.<sup>31</sup> As Barkan observes, this ‘new international emphasis on morality has been characterized not only by accusing other countries of human rights abuses but also by self-examination’.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, this critical self-examination appears to be decidedly backward looking, whereby, in the liberal ‘end of history’,<sup>33</sup> states are now compelled to rummage through their pasts and distance themselves from moments of shame and atrocity.

Such an altering discourse speaks to what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider term a ‘memory imperative’, which establishes ‘a set of political and normative expectations to engage with past injustices’.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, it would seem that the offering of apologies for past atrocity buttresses this liberal imperative, enabling states to publicly deplore violations of liberal norms, thereby reinforcing the very rules they once transgressed. This enables states to enact Goffman’s aforementioned ‘remedial posture’, whereby the apology attempts to enhance social stature and expunge the transgression from the fabric of one’s constructed identity by publically engaging in self-flagellation and positioning the state in opposition to the violation.<sup>35</sup>

In line with this ‘memory imperative’, in the specific texts of the apologies – most clearly the German, British, and Belgian cases – human rights violations are located and cast in a negative light.<sup>36</sup> In the British apology, Cameron declares that ‘what happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong.’ He also outlined specific violations, saying that

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Human Rights and Memory* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘Stigma management in International Relations: Transgressive identities, norms, and order in international society’, *International Organization*, 68:1 (2014), p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Levy and Sznaider, *Rights*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Barkan, *Guilt of Nations*, p. xvii.

<sup>33</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘The end of history?’, *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), pp. 3–18.

<sup>34</sup> Levy and Sznaider, *Human Rights and Memory*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Goffman, *Relations in Public*, pp. 108–14.

<sup>36</sup> As discussed in the final section, the Italian apology is vaguer about identifying specific human rights violations, speaking euphemistically about ‘what happened many years ago and that has marked many of your families’. Berlusconi, ‘Sintesi dell’intervento’.

Some of those killed or injured were clearly fleeing or going to the assistance of others who were dying . . . one person . . . was shot while crawling away from the soldiers. Another was shot in all probability when he was lying mortally wounded on the ground.<sup>37</sup>

The German apology, likewise, affirms that

General Trotha commanded that every Herero be shot – with no mercy shown even to women and children. After the battle of Waterberg in 1904, the survivors were forced into the Omaheke desert, where they were denied any access to water sources and were left to die of thirst and starvation.

Following the uprisings, the surviving Herero, Nama and Damara were interned in camps and put to forced labour of such brutality that many did not survive.<sup>38</sup>

Less graphically, the Belgian parliamentary apology declared that ‘the government deploras [that the then government] revealed a lack of consideration for the physical integrity of Patrice Lumumba’.<sup>39</sup> Such statements, from one perspective, endorse human rights regimes, insofar as they recognise and condemn human rights infringements committed against people whom they once overtly or tacitly assumed to be less worthy of such dignities.

Clearly underpinning the liberal concept of human rights is the ideal that they are universal. This finds its clearest expression in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, attesting that ‘recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.<sup>40</sup> Yet, in analysis, these apologies are discernibly not universal. Rather, the texts apply to isolated and narrow incidents,<sup>41</sup> where there have arisen societal contestations at the events.<sup>42</sup> Instead of renouncing colonial projects *per se* or disparaging the human rights violations that are intrinsic to colonial projects, the apologies are delimited in specific ways. For instance, the British Bloody Sunday apology is for one particular massacre, rather than placed in the context of the more systemic violations of British authority in the province. Likewise, the German apology for the Herero genocide is for the specific crime that ‘would today be termed genocide’,<sup>43</sup> rather than the systemic violations of German colonialism in South-west Africa. On its part, the Belgium apology is for involvement in the assassination of Lumumba, but does not renounce wider Belgian historical colonial atrocities in the region.<sup>44</sup> Even the Italian apology, offered for colonialism in Libya, is notable for the absence of contrition to other former colonies that appear to be of less geopolitical strategic importance.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cameron, ‘Bloody Sunday’.

<sup>38</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

<sup>39</sup> Chambre des Représentants, ‘“Compte” rendu intégral avec compte rendu analytique traduit des interventions – séance plénière’ (5 February 2002), available at: {<http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/pdf/50/ip205.pdf>} accessed 20 January 2014, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, *UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III)* (10 December 1948), Preamble.

<sup>41</sup> Gibney, ‘Rethinking our sorrow’, pp. 280–1.

<sup>42</sup> Tom Bentley, ‘The Empire retracts: A case study analysis of official European state apologies offered between 2002 and 2010 for transgressions committed against former colonies’ (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

<sup>44</sup> Gibney, ‘Rethinking our sorrow’.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of the geopolitical significance of Libya to Italy – at least before the Arab Spring – see Valter Coralluzzo, ‘Italy and the Mediterranean: Relations with the Maghreb Countries’, *Modern Italy*, 13:2 (2008), pp. 115–33; Arturo Varvelli, ‘Italy and Libya: Renewing a special relationship’, *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 45:3 (2010), pp. 117–30.



This, one may suggest, indicates that the universal doctrines of human rights, at least in terms of these performative rituals, are less than universal. Instead, they are only applicable where there are particular circumstances in which there are strong pressures exerted for them to be offered. As Mark Gibney writes, ‘the approach to apologizing taken by the former colonial powers has been eerily reminiscent of the way colonialism itself was carried out: divide and conquer’.<sup>46</sup> In this observation one can locate a break or contradiction from the idea of universal human rights, which liberal polities rhetorically advance and apologies intuitively endorse. The UN Declaration of Human Rights states that ‘contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind’.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, as illustrated by the extracts of the apologies above, certain violations have been repudiated. However, judging from the uneven nature of political apology, it seems that some have shocked the conscience of liberal states more than others.

Moreover, whether or not an apology is offered is not in direct proportion to the extent of the crime committed. For example, far more people were killed in the German response to the Maji Maji rebellion than in the Herero genocide. Equally, there are numerous unapologised for massacres perpetrated during British colonialism that resulted in more deaths than Bloody Sunday. For instance, visiting India in 2013, Cameron maintained that it would be mistaken to ‘reach back into history’ and apologise for the 1919 Amritsar massacre, in which almost 400 people were killed.<sup>48</sup>

Such an uneven record of apologising for human rights violations strikes a chord with wider dilemmas for liberal states in terms of their responses to issues of human rights. It is clear that liberal elites are quick to condemn human rights violations in certain states, but are more hesitant to do so among certain geopolitically significant allies. Likewise, humanitarian interventions are deemed appropriate in the case of particular violations, but not in the cases of other similar scenarios. Here, the issue of colonial apologies represents a performative microcosm of liberal elites’ uneven and less than universal response to breaches of human rights.

### Renouncing violence and the dilemma of preserving sanitising or glorifying narratives

To defend, for one moment, the shortcomings of liberal states apologising for only limited events, one may point to the obvious difficulties of European states apologising for the whole plethora of colonial crimes, which would involve so many apologies as to make it a logistically near impossible task. One could say, then, that apologising for only limited events might hold symbolic weight that somehow encompasses other transgressions: In one academic’s words, perhaps ‘the incident in question acts as a *synecdoche*, standing in for the larger narrative or pattern of action’.<sup>49</sup> Following this line of thought, apologising for particularly prominent episodes of colonial violence would serve as symbolic statements which, in line with liberalism, function to accentuate the liberal polity’s broader distaste for arbitrary violence and, thereby, reinforce

<sup>46</sup> Gibney, ‘Rethinking our sorrow’, p. 281.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, *UN General Assembly Resolution*, Preamble.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Watt, ‘David Cameron defends lack of apology for British massacre at Amritsar’, *The Guardian* (20 February 2013), available at: {<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/feb/20/david-cameron-amritsar-massacre-india>} accessed 10 January 2014.

<sup>49</sup> I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for this point for my forthcoming book, *Empires of Remorse*, to be published with Routledge.

normative tenets that disavow the wider violent structures that produced such specific violations.

The dilemma is that the apologies are demonstrably not framed as symbolic of a broader contrition for the wider violations of colonialism. By contrast, there is an endurance of narratives that contemporaneously revere or sanitise the (violent) colonial past. For instance, Louis Michel, the Belgian foreign minister who offered the Lumumba apology, elsewhere stated that King Leopold II was a ‘visionary’ and a ‘hero’. Against the accusation of turning Congo into a labour camp, Michel rehearsed the conventional colonial script of progress and infrastructural development, saying that ‘the Belgians built railways, schools, and hospitals and stimulated economic growth in Congo. A labour camp? Not at all.’<sup>50</sup> Similarly, following the BBC documentary *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* that detailed Leopoldian crimes in the Congo, Michel took the unusual step of releasing an official statement through the Foreign Affairs Press Office condemning the programme for overlooking a ‘set of positive contributions that our Congolese partners do not fail to recognise’.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, Berlusconi, himself the apologist, infamously described Mussolini’s rule as a ‘benign dictatorship’,<sup>52</sup> while elsewhere speaking of the ‘superiority’ of Western civilisation.<sup>53</sup> In similar language, Umberto Bossi, formerly deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in the Berlusconi government, ventured that in Libya ‘the Italians brought not only roads and employment, but also those values, that civilization and those laws that are a lighthouse for a whole culture’.<sup>54</sup> In the apology text, Cameron omits any contextualisation of the Bloody Sunday massacre as being within the dynamics of British colonialism or occupation. Instead of reflecting on the wider injurious nature of British colonialism in Ireland and Northern Ireland, Cameron revered (in the apology) the armed forces’ ‘enormous courage and professionalism in upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland’. Moreover, again in the text of the apology, he celebrated how ‘acting in support of the police, they played a major part in setting the conditions that have made peaceful politics possible’.<sup>55</sup> This is, in the process of apology, to cast a narrative whereby the massacre is an anomaly in a largely favourable British role of providing peace and security in Northern Ireland.

Beyond the glorifying or sanitising rhetoric of the apologising politicians and their cabinet colleagues, one can trace similar narratives in official state sanctioned sites. For example, concurrent with the apology, a schoolbook for 12-year olds in Belgium presented colonialism as follows:

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in ‘King Leopold II was a visionary hero’, *Flandersnews.be* (22 June 2010), available at: {<http://derefactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.808003>} accessed 15 September 2014.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Reactie op film white king, red rubber, black death’, *Persdienst Buitenlandse Zaken* (29 March 2004), available at: {<http://www.presscenter.org/nl/pressrelease/20040329/reactie-op-film-white-king-red-rubber-black-death-0>} accessed 20 January 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Farrell, ‘Diary’, *The Spectator* (13 September 2003), available at: {<http://www.spectator.co.uk/the-week/diary/11475/diary-83/>} accessed 20 January 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Abdelaziz Testas, ‘Models of cultural exclusion and civilizational clashes: A comparison between Huntington and Siddiqui’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 14:2 (2003), p. 183.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Miguel Mellino, ‘Italy and postcolonial studies – a difficult encounter’, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 8:3 (2006), p. 470.

<sup>55</sup> Cameron, ‘Bloody Sunday’.

When the Belgians arrived in the Congo, they found a population that was victim of bloody rivalries and slave trade. Belgian civil servants, missionaries, doctors, colonialists and engineers civilized the black population step by step. They created modern cities, roads and railroads, harbours and airports, factories and mines, schools and hospitals. The work greatly improved the living conditions of the indigenous people.<sup>56</sup>

Not dissimilarly, one can point to the Royal Museum of Central Africa as a central officialised site that, even at the moment of apology and beyond, exhibited a colonial narrative that largely sanitised and revered Belgian colonialism in Africa.<sup>57</sup> For instance, at the time and subsequent to the apology, museum plaques read:

'La Belgique apportant la civilisation au Congo' [Belgium bringing civilization to the Congo], 'L'esclavage' [Slavery], 'La Belgique apportant le bien-etre au Congo' [Belgium bringing well-being to the Congo] 'La Belgique apportant la civilisation au Congo' [Belgium bringing civilization to the Congo].<sup>58</sup>

Adjoined with similar representations within the museum, this projected a mood of 'imperial admiration and colonial sacrifice'.<sup>59</sup> Even following updates in 2005 (three years after the apology), the overwhelming emphasis of the museum reiterated a narrative whereby, in Hasian and Wood's words, 'the Congolese desired colonialism' and, despite some uncontrolled excesses, the Congo was a model colony.<sup>60</sup>

Regarding officialised narratives in Italy, in her study of high school textbooks, Grazia de Michele illustrates how the theme of colonial sanitisation is evident in the state education system.<sup>61</sup> While the overt colonial and racist stereotypes of immediate post war textbooks have largely dissipated, colonial occupation of Libya is 'discussed briefly as something of little importance', thereby strengthening 'the traditional view that Italians had not committed atrocities and that the colonial campaigns were a brief parenthesis in Italian history'.<sup>62</sup> In a similar study, Leone and Mastrovito find that the majority of contemporary textbooks use vague and ambiguous language that veil Italian atrocities.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, there are examples of overt attempts to remove Italian colonialism from societal introspection during the latter years of the First Republic that endure up to the time of the apology. For instance, the 1981 film *Lion of the Desert* about Libyan resistance to Italian colonial rule was banned by the Italian government on the grounds that it was 'damaging' to the army's honour.<sup>64</sup> By the 2008 apology, the film had still not been publicly broadcast in Italy.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Guy Vanthemsche, 'The historiography of Belgian colonialism in the Congo', in C. Lévai (ed.), *Europe and the World in European Historiography* (Pisa: Edizioni Plus-Pisa University Press, 2006), p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> See Marouf Hasian and Rulon Wood, 'Critical museology, (post)colonial communication, and the gradual mastering of traumatic pasts at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA)', *Western Journal of Communication*, 74:2 (2010), pp. 128–149; Adam Hochschild, 'In the Heart of Darkness', *The New York Review of Books*, 52:15 (2005), pp. 39–42; Jean M. Rahier, 'The Ghost of Leopold II: The Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa and its Dusty Colonialist Exhibition', *Research in African Literatures*, 34:1 (2003), pp. 58–84.

<sup>58</sup> Cited in Hasian and Wood, 'Critical Museology', p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Grazia De Michele, "'A beautiful moment of bravery and hard work": Italian colonialism in post-1945 history high school textbooks', *Modern Italy*, 16:2 (2011), pp. 105–20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>63</sup> Giovanna Leone and Tiziana Mastrovito, 'Learning about our shameful past: A socio-psychological analysis of present-day historical narratives of Italian colonial wars', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4:1 (2010), pp. 11–27.

<sup>64</sup> 'Undoing the damage', *The Economist* (31 July 2008), available at: {[http://www.economist.com/node/11849270?story\\_id=11849270](http://www.economist.com/node/11849270?story_id=11849270)}; accessed 12 January 2014.

This exhibits a tension in the ways that states employ and conceal the past to trumpet their contemporary identities. On the one hand, states increasingly renounce past violence in bolstering their liberal credentials. On the other hand, states have not set aside the more embedded ‘heroic’ or sanitising narratives that are complicit in such violence. In implicitly downplaying, negating, or revering the former violent colonial projects, such dualities make for an uneasy ideological marriage. Indeed, there is a peculiar admixture of these seemingly irreconcilable impulses – the contrite and the aggrandising narratives – with them often appearing from the same politicians and governments in extremely close proximity to each other and sometimes within the same text. Here, just as early liberalism was intellectually contaminated with colonial sentiments,<sup>65</sup> it is possible to see that liberalism’s twenty-first-century rituals of legitimation retain vestiges of this uncomfortable tendency of celebrating or sanitising Empire.

### Articulating equal relations and the dilemma of hierarchical discourses and policies

In an era of formal independence and the decline of bipolar geopolitical tensions, there has been an increasing imperative for former colonial powers to reconcile and forge more amiable relations with their erstwhile colonies. Sitting with liberal cosmopolitan virtues, Western liberal states have become more adept in the parlance of attesting to formal equality among nations. Notably, in the texts of their apologies, there is a tendency for the liberal polities to endorse such progressive and apparently reconciled interstate relations. For instance, *The Treaty of Friendship* – a treaty adjoined to Berlusconi’s apology – speaks of ‘the construction of a new phase of Italian-Libyan relations based on mutual respect, equal dignity and an equal and balanced relationship’.<sup>66</sup> The Italian apology itself talks of ‘a friendship that will make people happier’ and how ‘peoples of Africa look to Libya, look at your Leader, and know that only together can we improve well-being in the world and [Africa can] become on par with Europe and with other continents’.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, the German apology talks of a vision of ‘equal access’ to resources, ‘friendship’, and ‘mutual respect’,<sup>68</sup> while the Belgian apology emphasises ‘genuine solidarity with the Congolese people’.<sup>69</sup> Yet alongside such proclamations of apparent equality, analysis demonstrates policies and discourses that, even in apology, belie such sentiments. Clearly, an argument asserting that apology reproduces entrenched hierarchies may seem counterintuitive and controversial, but, as this section demonstrates, paternalistic and infantilising sentiments linger within the apologising texts themselves. Moreover, there are persisting policies attached to the *mea culpa* that serve to entrench and reproduce inequalities between former metropole and colony. Should one term such

<sup>65</sup> Beate Jahn, ‘Kant, Mill, and illiberal legacies in international affairs’, *International Organization*, 59:1 (2005), pp. 177–207.

<sup>66</sup> Camera dei Deputati, ‘Ratifica ed esecuzione del Trattato di amicizia, partenariato e cooperazione tra la Repubblica italiana e la Grande Giamahiria araba libica popolare socialista, fatto a Bengasi il 30 agosto 2008’, *XVI Legislatura* (30 August 2008), available at: {[http://www.camera.it/\\_dati/leg16/lavori/schedela/apritelecomando\\_wai.asp?codice=16pd10017390](http://www.camera.it/_dati/leg16/lavori/schedela/apritelecomando_wai.asp?codice=16pd10017390)}; accessed 20 January 2014, Preamble.

<sup>67</sup> Berlusconi, ‘Sintesi dell’intervento’.

<sup>68</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

<sup>69</sup> Chambre des Représentants, ‘Compte’, p. 52.

discourses and policies as ‘neocolonial’, then, it is possible to observe incongruity with supposedly liberal sentiments.

The clearest example of this is in terms of the Italian apology to Libya. Here, even the title of the adjoined treaty – *The Treaty of Friendship* – gives a flavour of supposedly cordial and equal relations. This reconciliatory dimension is compounded by the headline grabbing US \$5 billion dollars reparations established within the Treaty.<sup>70</sup> Critical analysis of the Treaty and reparations, however, reveals resembling characteristics between the terms of the Treaty and former colonial relations. Firstly, there is an establishment of a politico-economic relationship in which the Treaty served Italian geostrategic interests and retained Libya as a prime source for resource extrapolation and exploitation. Rather than based on inference, this is plainly stated by Berlusconi, with the prime minister declaring that the Treaty would lead to ‘fewer illegal immigrants leaving from the coast of Libya and coming to us, and more Libyan oil and gas’.<sup>71</sup>

In the terms of the Treaty, no money is actually transferred to Libya. Instead, the money is to provide for ‘basic infrastructure projects’, for which ‘Italian companies shall provide for the implementation of such projects’.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, ‘the financial funds are managed by the Italian party while Libya will make the land available, at no cost to Italy or the manufacturers’.<sup>73</sup> In other words, while the Treaty purports to establish an ‘equal and balanced relationship’,<sup>74</sup> it ensures that the means of production remain in the metropole. Thus, though undoubtedly a significant sum, the US \$5 billion dollars is a reinvestment into Italian businesses and corporations and is dwarfed by concurrent lucrative contracts for Italian companies, such as ENI’s 2008 signing of six Exploration and Production Sharing contracts, ensuring Italy’s oil supply from Libya for a further 44 years for oil and 47 years for gas.<sup>75</sup> This illuminates an economic relationship whereby the US \$5 billion is less compensation, than strategic investment in a lucrative relationship that ensures that the former colony continues to serve as a prime site for resource extrapolation.

Beyond economic configurations reproduced through the Treaty, unequal compositions are scripted in a manner reminiscent of colonial discourse. Firstly, Article 19 of the Treaty allows for the intensification of ‘cooperation in combating terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration’,<sup>76</sup> thus unreflectively reproducing the familiar conflation of African immigration with drugs, crime, and the ‘War on Terror’. Secondly, it is evident in the paternalistic projects for which the Treaty commits Italy. For instance, there is a convergence between the narrative of the road building, infrastructure laying, benign Italian colonialist, and the ‘basic

<sup>70</sup> Camera del Deputati, ‘Trattato di amicizia’, Chapter II, Article 9.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Guy Dinmore and Heba Saleh, ‘Italy pledge paves way for Libya investment’, *Financial Times* (31 August 2008), available at: {<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e6d2e0f0-7787-11dd-be24-0000779fd18c.html#axzz1DsnQerh9>} accessed 10 February 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Camera del Deputati, ‘Trattato di amicizia’, Chapter II, Articles 8–9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Article 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Preamble.

<sup>75</sup> Varvelli, ‘Italy and Libya’, p. 126. There have been political efforts to revive the *Treaty of Friendship* in the post-Gaddafi era after it was suspended before the 2011 military intervention in Libya, of which Italy collaborated. See ‘Libya and Italy revive “friendship deal”’, *BBC News* (15 December 2011), available at: {<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16205827>} accessed 20 January 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Camera del Deputati, ‘Trattato di amicizia’.

infrastructure projects' that are central to the Treaty.<sup>77</sup> Just as the conventional Italian colonial narrative celebrates bringing roads, education, and hospitals to Africa, so too does the treaty enable a 1,700km highway across Libya to be built by Italian companies,<sup>78</sup> the allocation of university scholarships, and the treatment programme for mines victims.<sup>79</sup> The very language of Italy achieving 'basic infrastructure projects' is to infer on Libya the classic colonialist perception of a country that is inadequate in providing fundamental provisions without the aid of European assistance. Even if one accepts that such convergence of colonial and contemporary discourse is not consciously premeditated, it nevertheless reflects a reproduction of one of the central legitimising colonial tropes.

Similar self-congratulatory and paternalistic themes are couched in other apologies. The German apology text dwells extensively on the polity's liberal and progressive character, affirming that it is:

Open to the world and has in many ways become multicultural. We have achieved German reunification in a peaceful manner and enjoy being part of the enlarged European Union. We are a committed member of the United Nations, working for world-wide peace, human rights, development and poverty reduction. We provide sustained assistance to the people of Africa and strongly support the NEPAD initiative.<sup>80</sup>

Much of this projecting of liberal identity holds little in relation to Namibia or the Herero community, with the exception of Germany's commitment within the apology text to 'help Namibia tackle the challenges of development' and assist 'the necessary process of land reform'.<sup>81</sup>

Even beyond the paternalistic stance of offering assistance with this matter, analysis indicates that the apology must be understood in the context of, and as a response to, claims for reparations by the Herero community, particularly the Chief Hosea Kutako Foundation's legal claim in a US court in 2001 for reparations from the German government and businesses amounting to US \$4 billion.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, in analysing the text, Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul's apology employed legally savvy grammar and language so as to evade and disarm such demands.<sup>83</sup> As explored in more detail elsewhere, this negation of reparations, it can be argued, is interlinked with an objective of resisting land reform that would adversely affect the privileged position of German descendants' land ownership in Namibia.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, where there has been a

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., Chapter II, Article 8. For excellent discussions of the narratives and myths of Italian colonial rule, see Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (eds), *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Angelo Del Boca, 'The myths, suppressions, denials and defaults of Italian colonialism', in Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Mellino, 'Italy and postcolonial studies'.

<sup>78</sup> 'Libya 1,700 km road attracts 20 offers: Italy minister', *Reuters* (24 August 2010), available at: {<http://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE67N0CU20100824>} accessed 10 January 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Camera del Deputati, 'Trattato di amicizia', Chapter II, Article 10.

<sup>80</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, 'Speech'.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard Jamfa, 'Germany faces colonial history in Namibia: A very ambiguous "I am sorry"', in Gibney et al. (eds) *Age of Apology*, pp. 202–15, esp. pp. 208–9.

<sup>83</sup> Such legally savvy grammar and caveats are analysed in detail in the following section of the article.

<sup>84</sup> See Bentley, 'Empire retracts', pp. 84–93; Jamfa, 'Germany faces colonial history', pp. 206–7. Indicating Germany's interest in the settlers, Chancellor Kohl commenced a speech on a visit to Namibia in 1995 by exclaiming 'my dear fellow countrymen'. Quoted in Henning Melber, 'In the shadow of genocide: German-Namibian reconciliation a century later' (2006), available at: {<http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/melber-reconciliation2006.htm>} accessed 3 March 2010. Melber further shows the government's concern for the 'German' community in Namibia by referring to President Herzog's criticism in 1998 of Namibian policies that had a perceived negative impact on the status of the German language in the country.



consistent refusal to negotiate or pay reparations that would enable more equitable land reform, there has, in contrast, been a consistent flow of aid from Germany to Namibia. Where reparations are paid on the terms of the transgressed against, aid has philanthropic overtones and comes with tacit leverages, enabling a continued wielding of influence within Namibia and providing implicit influence over matters of the German government's concern. In this case, the focus of aid on land reform assists in continuing to shape land ownership patterns that mirror the complexions that were forged through the violent dispossessions of colonialism. This is not to say that Germany's contemporary policies on land reform are identical to the violent dispossession of indigenous peoples in the colonial period. However, these policies do serve, at least in part, to uphold a land ownership complexion in Namibia whereby, in 2010, 6,123 out of 6,292 farms (approximately 95 per cent of the commercial farming sector) were still owned by white people.<sup>85</sup>

This sense of unilateral paternalism was most vividly illustrated in 2005 when, a year subsequent to her apology, Wieczorek-Zeul announced, without consultation, the initiative to set aside US \$25 million over the next ten years for development as a 'process of reconciliation'.<sup>86</sup> This benevolence did not win favour with the Ovaherero Genocide Committee and Marco Hausiku, the Namibian foreign minister, to Wieczorek-Zeul's surprise, stated that 'the Namibian government first had to consult those affected before signing'.<sup>87</sup> It is such interactions that enable one to observe a paternal relationship whereby both the apology and the aid are constituted by Germany as magnanimous gestures that shape a narrative about a transcendent Germany that is liberal in its political complexion and generous in its developmental practice.

The Belgian apology, too, is laden with paternalistic sentiments. Just as, the German apology spoke of assistance with land reform, the Belgian apology text announced a commitment to 'fund a Patrice Lumumba foundation of up to EUR €3,750,000, supplemented by a minimum annual amount of EUR €500,000'.<sup>88</sup> The objective of the foundation, according to the apology text, was 'to seek democratic development in Congo by financing projects for preventing conflict, strengthening the rule of law and training young people'.<sup>89</sup> Even beyond this parsimonious figure – a figure that Gibney terms 'intolerable' and bordering 'on the obscene' – there remain important conundrums with this discourse.<sup>90</sup> Given the various scandals among political and judicial circles in the preceding decade to the apology, there is an irony to Belgium's advocacy of good governance.<sup>91</sup> More pressingly, Leopoldian rule of

<sup>85</sup> P. Mufune, 'Land reform management in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe', *International Journal of Rural Management*, 6:1 (2010), p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Henning Hintze, 'Germany to pay N \$160 million for reconciliation', *The Namibian* (27 May 2005), available at: {[http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=17995&no\\_cache=1](http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=17995&no_cache=1)} accessed 19 March 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Jeremy Sarkin, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: The Socio-Legal Context of Claims under International Law by the Herero against Germany for Genocide in Namibia, 1904–1908* (London: Praeger Security International, 2009), pp. 136–7.

<sup>88</sup> Chambre des Représentants, 'Compte', p. 52.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Gibney, 'Rethinking our sorrow', p. 281.

<sup>91</sup> The key scandal in Belgian governance in the preceding decade to the apology was the *Dutroux affair*. This entailed public anger and protest at perceived political, judicial, and police mishandling of the response to Detroux's kidnapping and murder of several young girls. See Paul Kerstens, "'Deliver us from original sin": Belgian apologies to Rwanda and the Congo', in Gibney et al. (eds) *Age of Apology*, pp. 190–1.

the Congo Free State entailed some of the worst crimes in human history, including causing millions of deaths and innumerable amputations.<sup>92</sup> In more contemporary times, Belgian aid to Zaire under President Mobutu surpassed US \$100 million in the late 1980s,<sup>93</sup> a figure far exceeding the Lumumba Fund and clearly not contributing to democratic development.

Such examples illustrate a paternalism, combined with a liberal complacency and a form of hypocrisy that permeate the apologies. That is, the apology is renouncing involvement in the assassination of an elected leader, while simultaneously imparting prescriptive guidance on how the DRC should be governed. Likewise, there is an apology for genocide of the Herero community (a central event in shaping contemporary land ownership) that is adjoined with condescending sentiments of development assistance and support with land reform. There is an apology for colonialism in Libya and a simultaneous proffering of the developmental narratives that once furnished and legitimised the colonial endeavour itself. Thus, while – in accordance to liberal tenets – the apologies emphasise reconciled and more egalitarian relationships with the former colony, they at once reproduce discourses and policies that recycle geopolitical inequalities and tropes that are reminiscent of, and steeped in, colonial era sentiments.

### **Transparency, accountability, and the dilemma of delimited or obfuscated responsibility**

The final mode addressed here by which colonial state apologies appear (problematically) to affirm liberalism is that they seem to meet the liberal criteria of demonstrating openness, transparency, and accountability in government – even (or especially) for undesirable policies and outcomes. In the primary texts of the apologies, the orators are keen to emphasise this transparency: David Cameron, for instance, underscored how ‘this report and the Inquiry itself [the government inquiry into Bloody Sunday] demonstrate how a state should hold itself to account’, adding that it is ‘one of the things that differentiates us from the terrorists’.<sup>94</sup> The Belgian apology emphasised that one of the key lessons to be learned from the official inquiry into Lumumba’s death was the importance of ‘the proper functioning of decision making and policy transparency in a democratic system’. The apology text continued by saying that ‘the government must be informed about acts performed by officials. The government is responsible to Parliament, which has the right to be informed correctly and completely.’<sup>95</sup> The German apology underlined how ‘we Germans accept our historical and moral responsibility and the guilt incurred by Germans at that time’.<sup>96</sup>

But, in expressing such sentiments, there is an obvious fissure created with liberal concepts of justice and responsibility. To develop the point: Interpersonal apologies are typically more attuned to liberal concepts of the individual’s responsibility, in the

<sup>92</sup> See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

<sup>93</sup> Jean-Claude Willame, ‘The “Friends of the Congo” and the Kabila System’, *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 26:1 (1998), p. 27.

<sup>94</sup> Cameron, ‘Bloody Sunday’.

<sup>95</sup> Chambre des Représentants, ‘Compte’, p. 51.

<sup>96</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

sense that it is customary for the apologist to accept personal responsibility for the offence. In colonial apologies, the apologist's responsibility is far more ambiguous or nonexistent. Indeed, colonial apologies for the case studies analysed can be termed *intergenerational*, insofar as the politicians that offered contrition were either not born at the time of the offence or were children; they played no personal role in the actual transgression, either directly or as part of the state apparatus. Cameron even points this out in the text of his apology, saying that 'for someone of my generation, Bloody Sunday and the early 1970s are something we feel we have learnt about rather than lived through'.<sup>97</sup>

That the individuals were apologising for an offense they themselves did not commit represents a curious ontological break from conventional ideas of secular liberal justice. This is to say that the liberal concept of justice typically emphasises the moral and legal responsibility for one's own individual actions, rather than those of one's forefathers or community.<sup>98</sup> It is such 'ahistorical liberalism', as Janna Thompson terms it,<sup>99</sup> that feeds into former Australian Prime Minister John Howard's refusal to apologise to the indigenous 'Stolen Generation' on the grounds that he does 'not believe as a matter of principle that one generation can assume responsibility for the acts and deeds of an earlier generation'.<sup>100</sup>

One – deeply problematic – argument that defends (or demands) liberal apology is termed 'guilt by virtue of privilege'.<sup>101</sup> As Sandra L. Bartky explains, she is 'guilty by virtue of simply being who and what I am: a white woman born into an aspiring middle class family in a racist and class-ridden society'.<sup>102</sup> By this argument's logic, one acquires guilt through reaping the unearned benefits of crimes and appropriations carried out by a previous generation. There can, in one sense, be no doubt that the West's contemporary comparative affluence is based in no small measure on the enslavement and exploitation that took place under colonialism. Yet, clearly the 'rewards' of colonialism and neocolonialism are not felt evenly across society, with many in Britain, Germany, Italy, and Belgium suffering as a result of this. Similarly, it is not clear that citizens in the metropole directly benefited from the particular crimes of Bloody Sunday, the Herero Genocide, or the Lumumba assassination, for instance. Most significantly, the process of attributing guilt and gauging privilege in this way does not provide adequate conceptualisation of the different degrees of responsibility between orchestrating perpetrators, foot soldiers, bystanders, and descendants.

This ontological fissure of individual and collective responsibility in liberal polities is particularly acute where the apologies are explicitly offered by a politician on behalf of the people or nation. Cameron, in the British apology, apologises 'on behalf of the government, indeed, on behalf of our country';<sup>103</sup> Berlusconi draws his standing in the primary text,<sup>104</sup> saying 'on behalf of the Italian people, as head of government, I

<sup>97</sup> Cameron, 'Bloody Sunday'.

<sup>98</sup> Celermajer, 'Sins of the nation', p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Thompson, 'Apology, historical obligations', p. 196.

<sup>100</sup> John Howard, 'Speech at John F. Kennedy School of Government', Boston, 11 March 2008.

<sup>101</sup> Sandra L. Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity' and other Essays* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 139.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>103</sup> Cameron, 'Bloody Sunday'.

<sup>104</sup> 'Standing' refers to having the appropriate legal or moral authority to be the person to apologise. For a discussion, see Nick Smith, 'The categorical apology', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 36:4 (2005), pp. 489–90.

feel compelled to apologise';<sup>105</sup> and, as already indicated, the German apology evokes the entire population, saying that 'we Germans accept our historical and moral responsibility'.<sup>106</sup> From one perspective, the politicians garner legitimacy to speak on behalf of a whole population because they have been popularly elected. However, even with elected representatives, clearly there are those that do not wish to offer apologies and do not feel remorse themselves. This conundrum is keenly felt in liberal multicultural societies where citizens frequently have heritage that derives from both the metropole and the colony, thereby causing such notions of guilt to create complex identity dilemmas. Such confusion is especially present in the German apology, which not only explicitly evokes the responsibility of 'we Germans', but, in the same text, celebrates Germany's liberal complexion by underlining that Germany is now 'open to the world and in many ways has become multicultural'.<sup>107</sup> Similar dilemmas exist in Cameron's apology, where the prime minister offers the apology on behalf of 'our country'.<sup>108</sup> Should 'our country' refer the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, then it creates a paradox in which the families of those killed and the wider Nationalist community of Northern Ireland are essentially apologising to themselves. Alternatively, if, by 'our country', Cameron is referring to Britain (or even England), this would be to concede that the prime minister speaks from Britain to Northern Ireland, thereby implicitly destabilising his legitimacy to speak as prime minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

A more sophisticated solution to the conundrum of liberal justice and the responsibility of the individual is offered in a series of publications by Thompson.<sup>109</sup> She makes the case that citizens have enduring obligations to the past actions of the state, contending that states are 'transgenerational polities in which members pass on responsibilities and entitlements from one generation to another'.<sup>110</sup> She explains that present citizens make policies, treaties, and contractual agreements that bestow binding commitments upon future actions. In doing so, the present generation anticipates and requires that future members of the polity adhere to these commitments. This entails a moral relationship in which members are bound to accept the stipulations laid down by a previous generation. In this way, while the current generation of the polity may not feel remorse or sentiment, they are still tied by the moral imperative of fulfilling the obligations of previous incarnations of the polity, thereby leading to the importance of offering apology and restitution for the past injustices committed by the state.<sup>111</sup>

So, there is a potential way out of the conundrum: Contemporary liberal politicians can gain standing to offer apologies as representatives of the state – as agents who speak on behalf of the particular institution that committed the transgression – even if they themselves and the majority of the population did not commit the offence. The Belgium apology most closely follows this, in the sense that it does not evoke the population as the other apologies do. In this regard, it only directly evokes

<sup>105</sup> Berlusconi, 'Sintesi dell'intervento'.

<sup>106</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, 'Speech'.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Cameron, 'Bloody Sunday'.

<sup>109</sup> Thompson, *Taking Responsibility for the Past*; Thompson, 'Apology, justice and respect'; Thompson, 'Apology, historical obligations'.

<sup>110</sup> Thompson, 'Apology, justice and respect', p. 38.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

the government, saying ‘the Government believes’ it is appropriate to offer ‘profound and sincere regrets, together with its apologies’.<sup>112</sup> As well as evoking the country or population, the politicians in the other cases also draw on their positions in the government to cement their authority to offer contrition. Wieczorek-Zeul, affirms her position at the start of the apology, saying that she speaks ‘as the German minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and as a representative of the German government and the German parliament’.<sup>113</sup> Berlusconi affirms his position to speak as ‘head of the government’ and,<sup>114</sup> as already noted, Cameron affirms that he speaks ‘on behalf of the government’, whom he notes is ‘ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces’.<sup>115</sup>

Yet, in analyses of the primary texts of the apologies, we see that this it is not clear that the apologies do accept state responsibility. Although the politicians garner their standing as representatives of the state, at the moment of doing so, they proceed to distance the state from responsibility in the apology texts. The British and the Belgian apologies both do this explicitly, using their respective parliamentary speeches to delimit state responsibility. Cameron maintains that:

Those looking for premeditation, a plan, those even looking for a conspiracy involving senior politicians or senior members of the armed forces, they will not find it in this report. Indeed, Lord Saville finds no evidence that the events of Bloody Sunday were premeditated, he concludes that the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland governments and the army neither tolerated nor encouraged the use of unjustified lethal force.<sup>116</sup>

The Belgian apology similarly emphasises how ‘the parliamentary investigation committee has found no indication or evidence to demonstrate that the Belgian government of the day would have required the physical elimination of Patrice Lumumba’.<sup>117</sup> While conceding the ‘involvement of Belgian government authorities when transferring Lumumba to Katanga’ (where he was executed), the primary apology text makes clear that the *mea culpa* is not for Lumumba’s actual execution, but for ‘insensitive neutrality and apathy to the fate of Patrice Lumumba’;<sup>118</sup> clearly a far less legally significant crime.

In one respect, there is highly plausible veracity to the position (via the Saville Inquiry) that the London government and upper echelons of the army did not specifically order the atrocities of 30 January. Likewise, it is conceivable that, contrary to authoritative research,<sup>119</sup> there was no concrete execution order from the upper echelons of the Belgian government and that the immediate executors were not Belgian. It is, after all, the case that imperial authority tends to have informal structures of domination, including unspoken delegation, entailing foot soldiers and collaborators adopting behaviour that both internalises colonial ideology and zealously exceeds direct orders. While the violence may not have been consciously ordered from above, clearly it is an outgrowth and part of a context of imperialism and militarism of which the respective governments are responsible. The salient point is

<sup>112</sup> Chambre des Représentants, ‘Compte’, pp. 50–1.

<sup>113</sup> Wieczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

<sup>114</sup> Berlusconi, ‘Sintesi dell’intervento’.

<sup>115</sup> Cameron, ‘Bloody Sunday’.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Chambre des Représentants, ‘Compte’, p. 50.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> See Ludo De Witte, *The assassination of Lumumba* (London: Verso, 2001). De Witte writes that ‘it was Belgian advice, Belgian orders and finally Belgian hands that killed Lumumba’ (p. xxii).

that, where, in line with liberalism, apologies might seem to afford a sense of transparency and openness, in the given rituals there is a duality of the state both taking responsibility and being at pains to delimit its responsibility within the same text.

Unlike the Belgian and British cases, the Italian and German apologies do not delimit state responsibility in such overt terms. Alluding only to 'those tragic and dramatic moments of the Italian occupation of your country' and 'for what happened many years ago and that has marked many of your families',<sup>120</sup> Berlusconi's apology clearly adopts vagueness and euphemism in a way that does not advance historical clarity, transparency, or responsibility. The German apology offers considerably more detail, but employs legally savvy language in a process of obfuscating and evading responsibility. In analysis of the text, Wiczorek-Zeul (in English) extensively utilises passive sentence structures: 'The survivors were forced into the Omaheke desert'; 'they were denied any access to water resources and were left to die of thirst and starvation'; 'following the uprisings, the surviving Herero, Nama and Damara were interned in camps'.<sup>121</sup> The passive voice is a useful grammatical device when the agent that undertook the verb is unknown, unimportant or purposefully excluded. Utilised here, it avoids directly linking the crimes to the direct strategy of the highest echelons of the German state.<sup>122</sup>

In areas where Wiczorek-Zeul utilised the more common active sentence structure, there are mechanisms by which she, at least grammatically, divorced the atrocities from the direct orders of the state. One such mechanism was to propel Von Trotha as the architect of the genocide: 'General von Trotha's troops embarked on a war of extermination against them [the Herero] and the Nama', and 'General Trotha commanded that every Herero be shot'.<sup>123</sup> Certainly Von Trotha's role as a key agent in the genocide is beyond dispute. However, excessive focus on him as the sole agent ignores the wider structural forces that drove the genocide. It is to ignore Von Trotha's accountability to the German state, his appointment by Kaiser Wilhelm II and to overlook the fact that concentration camps continued to function for several years after Von Trotha left the region in 1905.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, the German apology employs the second conditional at strategic moments in the apology text, affirming that 'the atrocities committed at that time would today be termed genocide'.<sup>125</sup> As such, Wiczorek-Zeul refrained from explicitly labelling the atrocities as genocide by attaching the temporal hypothetical caveat of it happening today. Such a conditional has particular legal implication, given that genocidal wars against indigenous peoples waged before 1948 are understood by most legal scholars not to have violated international law as they occurred before the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, by activating the conditional, Wiczorek-Zeul could recognise

<sup>120</sup> Berlusconi, 'Sintesi dell'intervento'.

<sup>121</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, 'Speech'.

<sup>122</sup> Sasha Romanowsky, 'Analysis of an apology: A critical look at genocide in Southwest Africa and its effects on the Herero/Nama People' (2009), available at: {<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/133p/papers/096RomanowskyHereroGenocide.htm>} accessed 9 December 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 359.

<sup>125</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, 'Speech'.

<sup>126</sup> See Rachel Anderson, 'Redressing colonial genocide under international law: The Hereros' cause of action against Germany', *California Law Review*, 93:4 (2005), p. 1155.



the event, while disconnecting it from contemporary legal accountability.<sup>127</sup> This legal position is reinforced by former German President Roman Herzog claiming in 1998 that the Herero had not been covered by International Law at the time of the genocide.<sup>128</sup> The apology text also utilises this grammatical structure in saying that ‘nowadays a General von Trotha would be prosecuted and convicted’.<sup>129</sup> This is true, but undoubtedly so too would others, including the highest governmental officials.<sup>130</sup> Here, then, while the apology claims to accept ‘historical and moral’ responsibility, analyses shows that the text evades state and legal responsibility.

In this way, apologising does, initially, appear to sit with liberal tenets of emphasising responsibility and accountability for state transgressions. Yet, a picture emerges where this form of accountability, rather than forging clarity, actually creates ambiguity and confusion with liberal tents. Firstly, there is the core ontological problem of liberal actors accepting historical responsibility for an action that they have not themselves committed. But, even if it can be accepted that liberal politicians can take responsibility for the state’s actions, then, once more, a further dilemma arises: On the one hand the politicians do seem to be speaking on behalf of the state (as well as the people) and taking responsibility, but, in the very texts of the apologies, are either using these platforms to employ obfuscating language regarding the transgressions or to evade and plea against aspects of historical responsibility in ways that overlap with legal expedience. Rather than clarity, it creates a sense of ambiguity, whereby the state both accepts and distances itself from responsibility in the same ritual.

### Areas for future research and concluding remarks

Before moving to the concluding remarks, it is necessary, especially given the novel research agenda, to consider the limitations of this work and avenues for future research. The necessity of a further study analysing the wider politics of colonial ‘regret’ and refusals to apologise has already been discussed. Beyond this, there is a further crucial point pertaining to the scope of the work: The goal of this article has been to analyse what the emerging phenomenon of colonial apology reveals about the normative underpinnings of the international arena. In pursuing this, the pre-established focus has been on metropolitan states’ and elites’ representations. The dilemma is that, in an important respect, there is a ‘meta-irony’ created here, whereby, in focusing on European elite/state voices and not the voices of subaltern communities, the article retreads the very path that it disparages.<sup>131</sup> This is a common conundrum in social sciences and IR in particular, where scholars are attracted to studying powerful actors and their discourses, but, even when offering critical analysis, elevate these voices at the expense of others, thereby inadvertently normalising and cementing such power relations. One is reminded of Gayatri C. Spivak’s eminent question: ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ and her discussion of the implications of scholars speaking

<sup>127</sup> Jamfa, ‘Germany faces colonial history’, p. 203; Romanowsky, ‘Analysis of an apology’.

<sup>128</sup> Jamfa, ‘Germany faces colonial history’, p. 203.

<sup>129</sup> Wiczorek-Zeul, ‘Speech’.

<sup>130</sup> Romanowsky, ‘Analysis of an apology’.

<sup>131</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

on behalf of the colonised.<sup>132</sup> To be clear, this article has not attempted to speak *for* or *on-behalf* of the colonised and is not even primarily about the colonised. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise this dilemma and it is hoped that there will be future research on the politics of how demands for apology are formulated, how given apologies are responded to by the formerly colonised, and the normative implications of these processes.

A second avenue for further research: The point of this article has been to interpret the rituals, rather than to offer prescriptive guidance as to how policymakers should offer *mea culpa* or, indeed, whether policymakers should even offer apologies in the first place. Nevertheless, the critique offered here inescapably raises questions as to what a felicitous liberal apology may look like.<sup>133</sup> While a fuller exploration of this question is left for future articles, one may be well advised to turn to sociological work on interpersonal apology to begin addressing this question. For Goffman:

In its fullest form, the apology has several elements: expression of embarrassment and chagrin; clarification that one knows what conduct had been expected and sympathizes with the application of negative sanction; verbal rejection, repudiation, and disavowal of the wrong way of behaving along with vilification of the self that so behaved; espousal of the right way and an avowal henceforth to pursue that course; performance of penance and the volunteering of restitution.<sup>134</sup>

Among other factors, a ‘categorical apology’ for sociologist Nick Smith entails a ‘corroborated factual record’ of the transgression; ‘acceptance of causal responsibility’; ‘identification of each moral wrong’; ‘reform and reparations’; and an appropriate standing to apologise.<sup>135</sup> Mihaela Mihai cautions against such a ‘check-list model of apology’,<sup>136</sup> recognising that ‘apologies will take different forms in different communities’.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, if one is to take Goffman and Smith’s criteria as starting benchmarks, then one may urge future research to identify how an apology might accomplish the difficult task of identifying each moral wrong – from the ideological (racism, expansionism, militarism) to the particular (theft, rape, torture, land dispossession, genocide, killing, humiliation); it would address ways to ensure that there is a disavowal and vilification of colonialism in its entirety, rather than offering elements of sanitisation and glorification; moreover, future research might ask how apologies could be offered in ways that chime with wider societal efforts to address the past, overcome embedded colonial attitudes of paternalism and superiority and assist in offering historical clarity. It would also explore how apologies and restitution might be utilised to help overcome enduring patterns of inequality between metropole and colony. These are difficult questions that this author does not have immediate answers to.

But perhaps these are difficult questions, not just because of the complex and problematic nature of using words to repair the past, but also because of dilemmas that go to the heart of liberalism. Like other normative political theories, there is an

<sup>132</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271–313.

<sup>133</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this question.

<sup>134</sup> Goffman, *Relations in Public*, p. 113.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, ‘Categorical Apology’. For an exploration of the components of a full group apology, also see Kathleen Gill, ‘The moral functions of an apology’, *The Philosophical Forum*, 31:1 (2000), pp. 11–27.

<sup>136</sup> Mihai, ‘When the state says “sorry”’, p. 208.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

important question as to whether consistency is ever possible within liberalism, both in terms of reconciling group and individual rights and responsibilities and in justly reconciling the colonial past with the liberal present. As Jahn shows, liberalism was intellectually furnished and moulded in the fires of colonial expansion and Eurocentric complacencies.<sup>138</sup> It may not be surprising, then, that this has spilled into twenty-first-century ritualistic sites where political elites performatively exhibit their liberal credentials and reproduce and affirm liberal normative principles in the international system. As this article has demonstrated, in the process of colonial state apologies, liberal elites both repudiate aspects of the colonial past, yet continue to conjure infantilising and paternalistic discourses towards the former colony. It has shown politicians who at once condemn, but also exalt or sanitise the colonial past. It has captured politicians who speak the language of mutual respect, but – at the very moment of doing so – persist in forging dominant relations with former colonies. Significantly, the state apologies analysed here point to dilemmas and contradictions in an important ritualistic strategy which liberal elites increasingly turn to in twenty-first-century processes of legitimation.

<sup>138</sup> Jahn, 'Illiberal legacies'.