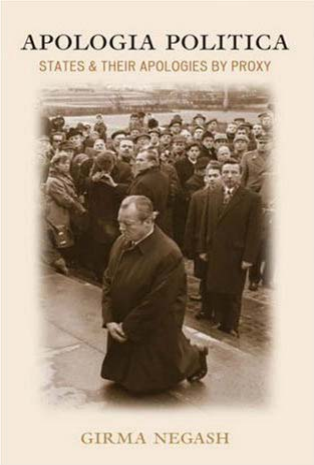

Title: Apologia Politica: States and their Apologies by Proxy

Author: Girma Negash

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Reviewed by: Dr. Klejda Mulaj
Senior Researcher
Gulf Research Center

Curiosity about the apology phenomenon is generating new scholarship to clarify meaning and better understand the dynamics of different kind of apologies. Girma Negash's book adds to this exploration. The author addresses the question about whether states can successfully apologize and the extent of political constraints on their apologies as well as their moral limits.

The increased frequency of public apologies, especially between national states, raises the questions as to why there are so many and why they are taking place now. Girma Negash suggests that there is a convergence of three philosophical traditions specifically informing the burgeoning apology practice. The first tradition comes from liberalism and those ideas and practices that have promoted peace and cooperation among states in the past. The second relates to the movement of states and their agents to become active movers of peace processes in ways other than traditional conflict resolution procedures would dictate. What makes this new approach a departure from the past is that statesmen, out of their own volition or under public pressure, are found apologizing for past and recent injustices, accepting accountability, taking responsibility, and displaying their remorse publicly. In such cases states and their agents are trying to lead their peoples toward reconciliation. The third area is that of moral theory as it relates, more narrowly, to explanatory accounts of how various ways of moral communities come into being.

Going through an apology is a painful experience but necessary in so far as it effects a transformation of the participants' relations and the world around them. Acknowledgement and remorse are subsumed as part of any form of apology, but an apology goes beyond that. It is aimed at seeking recognition by the victim that the perpetrator is redeemed through repentance and meaningful deeds. The author suggests four criteria for a successful public apology that are necessary to bring about healing and reconciliation, namely: acknowledgment, truth-telling, accountability, and public remorse. These are the minimal requirements for a successful apology by perpetrators of mass crimes and wrongdoing whether or not victims demand it and forgiveness is given.

Girma Negash examines four cases of political apology, starting with the archetypal case of apology and reconciliation between Germany and Israel. In a relatively short time Israeli Jews and the Germans have come to terms with a bitter past. The present ties between the two include scientific cooperation and cultural exchanges, Germany's committed military and economic aid since the 1950s, and the more recent increase in emigration of Israelis of German descent to Germany. It would appear, therefore, that the states of Israel and Germany now have normal relations, with diplomatic relations established since 1965. Yet, Negash argues that the memories of the Holocaust remain malleable symbolic tropes for politics, identity and historiography in both countries. The German government did apologize to the Jews but that apology – for Negash – was insufficient. He asserts that the inadequacies of the German apologies in regard to the public remorse imperative are two fold. First, the leaders engaged in both apologetic rhetoric and acts, and as in most political apologies, they were carrying out an "apology by proxy." Thus they rendered their apologies as office-holders and not as individuals. Secondly, public remorse and reckoning of it on record is the ultimate test of apology and reconciliation. Public remorse has been late in coming in Germany having been subject to realpolitik cynicism and ideologically-based debates. In the relations between Israel and Germany, gestures of sincere apology and public remorse have not been recognized so far for their worth because the rituals and symbolic gestures of reconciliation between the two have been normalized since diplomatic relations were established in 1965.

The second case study focuses on the political calculus of the Japanese political elite in response to the rising calls by its neighbors and the international community for an apology and compensation for Japan's war crimes. The slow-in-coming acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the Japanese can be attributed to several factors, beginning with the nature of the Japanese defeat. The aftermath and trauma resulting from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings, the first and last use of such weapons that killed 100,000 civilians in each city, understandably created a culture of victimization in Japan. In response to some of the first demands for apology and redress, the Japanese government's answer was that Japan had settled its obligations through several of the treaties it had signed since the end of the war. One such treaty was the Treaty of Basic Relations that Japan and South Korea signed in 1965, according to the terms of which Japan promised to provide South Korea with a grant of $300 million to be distributed over a 10-year period and also a long-term and low-interest $200 million loan extended by the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan. Yet, postwar rapprochement between Japan and its neighbors has been a failure. The Japanese leadership has been slow to acknowledge the brutal consequences of its colonialism and imperialist wars while at the same time downplaying war atrocities. Unlike Germany, which was left with the burden of guilt after the war, the legacies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have reinforced the reluctance of the new Japanese elite to acknowledge guilt for Japan's own crimes. The first acknowledgment of Japan's wartime excesses and remorseful pronouncements by government officials were not to be heard until the late 1980s and 1990s, and only after grassroots pressure from within Japan and from its Asian neighbors.

In the next case study – Rwanda – the author emphasizes that there is consensus that the UN debacle came not from any lack of information but from lack of political will by the most powerful in the UN to take action against genocidaires. In examining ex-post facto apologies, Negash notices that Clinton's acknowledgment of wrongdoing was not preceded by any government-led initiative or policy-relevant debate about a human rights calamity that involved the United States, even if only indirectly. Negash states that the same applies also to the Belgian prime minister's formal acknowledgement of wrongdoing on behalf of Belgium for its inaction during the mass killings of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus in the spring of 1994. He asserts that the Rwandan genocide has generated apologies that have turned out to be, for the most part, narratives of justification that came only *post facto*. These apologies amount to obfuscation of personal responsibility, and in democratizing blame they lay the ground for further indifference excluding any hope of genuine remorse. The apologies made by President Clinton in Kigali in 1998 were "uttered long before the apologetic deeds by groups, nations and international organizations manifested themselves in Rwanda." In a bold evaluation, Negash states that Clinton's repentant words rung hollow because they were hidden behind the hazy language that describes the international community and did not articulate the moral responsibilities of those at the United Nations who

actually made the crucial decisions of not intervening to prevent the genocide. In his opinion, it is only when the personal remorse is separated from the remorse by proxy that Clinton's depth of remorse will assume credibility.

The last case study focuses on the problematic of agency and responsibility as they relate to "inter-national conflict." It concentrates on two highly publicized American apologies to China involving the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade under NATO auspices on May 7, 1999, and the collision of an EP-3 spy plane with a Chinese F-8 fighter plane off the China coast on April 1, 2001. Negash suggests that in each diplomatic crisis involving China, the nature of acknowledgement of charges of wrongdoing by the United States government was limited in scope by the dictates of realpolitik, so much so that apology could only be conditional. In his opinion, the two apologies given to the Chinese fail in acknowledging wrongdoing to its fullest extent, stay far from truth telling, and are certainly lacking in remorse. The two apologies, however, lived up to the expectations of accountability and responsibility of the offending power. The expressions of remorse became part of public record. Nevertheless, affected by the constraints of realpolitik put upon them, the apologies and their responses were subject of mistrust. The apologia, in the diplomatic context, is meant to avoid diplomatic retaliation by explaining that the incidents were accidental and therefore should be excusable. Hence, they are more self-justifying rather than regretful and apologetic. Negash concludes that for the most part the apologies to China were impersonal, bureaucratic, and far removed from the moral-temporal communities in which genuine remorse is rendered and received.