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978-0-521-51669-3 - The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies

Danielle Celermajer

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The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies

In the last years of the twentieth century, political leaders the world over began to apologize for wrongs in their nations' pasts. Many dismissed these apologies as "mere words," cynical attempts to avoid more costly forms of reparation; others rejected them as inappropriate encroachments into politics or forms of action that belonged in personal relationships or religion. Yet political apologies have gripped nations and provoked tremendous resistance. To understand apology's extraordinary political emergence, we have to suspend our automatic interpretations of what it means for nations to apologize and interrogate the meaning afresh. Taking the reader on a journey through apology's religious history and contemporary apologetic dramas, this book argues that the apologetic phenomenon marks a new stage in our recognition of the importance of collective responsibility, the place of ritual in addressing national wrongs, and the contribution that practices that once belonged in the religious sphere might make to contemporary politics.

Danielle Celermajer is currently a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney. She was formerly Director of Indigenous Policy at the Australian Human Rights Commission. She was the recipient of grants from the Fulbright Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as a Mellon Fellowship. She has written extensively on transitional justice, human rights, religion, and the political thought of Hannah Arendt, and she recently co-edited a forthcoming book on Hannah Arendt and political judgement.

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*For Isaac, Hela, and John before
and Arielle after.*

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