



thruMYeyes

with PROF. BOLAJI AKINYEMI

THE WEEKLY FOREIGN-POLICY BRIEFING

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FROM THE ARCHIVE · FOREIGN POLICY

FORGIVE NOT FORGET

Germany apologized for Namibia, and paid for it —
Britain, France and Belgium never quite did.

Session 164 · Thursday 2 November 2023

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Session 164 — an apology, priced differently by whoever is asked to give it.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Forgive, Not Forget

From a German apology that came with a bill attached to a British one that never arrived, this week asks what an apology is actually worth once reparations enter the room.

An episode that opens on Kenya's gamble to abolish visas for fellow Africans and closes on a Pope invoking Genesis at a climate summit, but keeps circling back to one uncomfortable arithmetic: Germany apologized for Namibia and paid for it, and has now repeated the apology in Tanzania; Britain, France and Belgium have each found a way to regret the past without ever quite saying sorry to it. **Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi reads the gap between those two postures as the real story — not just of colonial memory, but of who currently has the leverage to demand something better than silence.**

An archive edition, recorded 2 November 2023, the week King Charles III visited Kenya and the Israel-Gaza war's first Security Council resolutions collapsed to competing vetoes. Events and figures are described as they stood that week.

01 · KENYA'S VISA-FREE GAMBLE, AND A LESSON EUROPE ALREADY PAID FOR

The session opens on Kenyan President William Ruto's pledge to scrap visa requirements for all African visitors by the end of the year. Prof. Akinyemi calls the goal magnificent in principle, culturally and economically, and notes the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and South Africa have already moved on similar waivers — but he tempers the enthusiasm with a warning drawn from Europe's own experience: the Schengen zone took years of technical and border investment to build, still doesn't cover the whole EU, and several southern member states are now threatening to

leave it over uneven migration burdens. Britain's own turn against free movement, he adds, fed directly into Brexit and a rightward drift within the Conservative Party.

His practical case for Ruto's move is more cynical than sentimental, on his account: African states can rarely afford to police porous borders anyway, so a visa-free policy may simply make a virtue of a necessity already forced on them by under-resourced customs and immigration services.

02 · GERMANY PAID FOR ITS APOLOGY. BRITAIN, FRANCE AND BELGIUM DIDN'T OFFER ONE.

King Charles III's Kenya visit — where he acknowledged colonial-era suffering without apologizing for it — becomes the hinge for the episode's sharpest argument. Prof. Akinyemi contrasts this directly with Germany, which apologized for its actions in Namibia and agreed to pay reparations, then repeated the apology in Tanzania this year despite the legal exposure that comes with the word. Britain, France and Belgium, on his account, have each avoided that exposure in their own way — Belgium reportedly debating and rejecting the word "apology" in favor of "we recognize that what happened should not have happened."

He's unsparing about what he calls a meanness of spirit behind Britain's restraint, while noting the late Queen never went even as far as her son has. He's equally candid about the harder question a viewer raised: whether these apologies are sincere reckonings at all, or simply colonial powers repositioning themselves for a rising Africa's resources. His answer splits the difference — only Germany has accepted the legal cost of honesty, and until African governments have the leverage to demand the same from the others, an apology without reparations is the cheapest thing on offer.

“It's one thing to have a forgiving spirit. It's another thing entirely not to be prepared to reckon with your own history.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

FOUR POWERS, ONE RECKONING				
WHO APOLOGIZED FOR COLONIAL-ERA HARM — AND WHO DIDN'T				
	GERMANY	BRITAIN	FRANCE	BELGIUM
Said sorry?	Yes	No	No	No
Paid reparations?	Yes, Namibia	No	No	No
2023 gesture	Apology renewed	Regret, no sorry	Said nothing	Avoided the word
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Four colonial powers, one reckoning, per the Professor's account of who apologized and who didn't.

03 · KENYA'S WARM WELCOME FOR THE VERY CROWN THE MAU MAU FOUGHT

Prof. Akinyemi is candid that one thing baffles him: given the brutality of Britain's response to the Mau Mau uprising, Kenya's relationship with the British crown has remained unusually warm — the country where a young princess became queen, and where a future king proposed to his future queen consort. He notes, pointedly, that Kenyan legislation banning the Mau Mau as an organization dates from British rule and has still not been repealed, and that land seized from the Kikuyu during the uprising was handed to loyalist farmers whose descendants hold it today, six decades after independence.

The deeper discomfort, on his account, is one Africans have inflicted on themselves: a forgiving spirit is admirable, but forgiving without reckoning with the history risks inviting the same treatment again.

04 · A QUIET COURTSHIP OVER TANZANIA, OR JUST A COINCIDENCE?

Prompted by Vice President Kamala Harris's trade mission to Tanzania earlier in the year and the German president's subsequent apology visit, the conversation turns to whether Tanzania has become a strategic prize contested by Washington and Berlin. Prof. Akinyemi is unpersuaded there's a pattern: on his account, Tanzania simply doesn't carry the kind of strategic weight that would explain competing great-power attention, unlike Kenya or South Africa, and he reads the timing as coincidental rather than orchestrated.

05 · A VETOED RESOLUTION, AND WHO ACTUALLY PAID FOR IT

Turning to an attack on Israeli passengers at a Russian airport, Prof. Akinyemi warns the Israel-Gaza war is spilling beyond the region in a way the Ukraine war hasn't, because Israeli and Jewish communities are dispersed worldwide in a way Ukrainian and Russian communities are not. He revisits a point he says he'd meant to make the previous week: he considers it a strategic error that Arab states didn't press Russia not to veto an earlier US-drafted Security Council resolution, since that resolution's humanitarian pause — while short of the ceasefire Arab states wanted — carried no time limit and required Security Council unanimity to lift, unlike a resolution with a hard expiry. Russia's veto of the American text, followed by America's veto of a competing Brazilian resolution with twelve votes in favor, left the impasse to old rivalries, on his account, with Palestinians and Arab states absorbing the cost of a standoff neither Moscow nor Washington will personally pay for.

He extends real emotion to the civilian toll — describing footage of wounded and orphaned children that has moved him to tears on air — and issues a pointed warning of his own: with more Jews living outside Israel than within it, a global backlash against Israeli policy risks falling hardest on diaspora Jewish communities who have no say in Netanyahu's war conduct.

“There are more Jews outside Israel than there are Jews within Israel. If the street boils over, the danger is not to the Jews in Israel — it is to the Jews outside it.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

06 · A POPE AT COP28, AND AN OLD MAN'S AUTHORITY

The episode closes on Pope Francis's plan to attend the COP28 climate summit in Dubai — the first papal appearance at such a gathering. Prof. Akinyemi reads it through the Pope's own 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, built around the idea that God created the world before creating humanity, and that a world destroyed cannot simply be remade for those who destroyed it. Whether or not the Pope's religious authority still commands attention, he suggests, humanity's general deference to age may do what deference to office no longer does.

THREADS TO PULL

- If an apology's sincerity is measured by whether the party offering it accepts real financial exposure, does that make Britain's restraint more honest than Germany's willingness to pay — or less?
- Can a formerly colonized country meaningfully forgive a history it has not been allowed to fully reckon with, or does unexamined forgiveness just reset the clock for the same behavior?

- If Security Council vetoes are traded like currency between rival powers, whose interests does the veto power actually protect once a real humanitarian emergency is on the table?
- Does warning that a backlash could fall on diaspora communities rather than a government's own citizens change the ethics of criticizing that government's conduct?
- Is a religious leader's climate intervention more likely to move public opinion because of his office, or, as suggested here, despite it?

Watch Session 164 in full on the Syncterface Media channel. New episodes every Thursday, 7pm WAT (7pm UK, 2pm ET).

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