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# Legacies of the Slave Trade: an Analysis of Demands, Apologies and Reparations in Britain over the Last 25 Years

Master's thesis in Lektorprogram English

Supervisor: Astrid Rasch

Co-supervisor: Aaron Ackerley

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## Abstract

In the last 25 years in Britain, there has been a dramatic increase in demands for apologies for the transatlantic slave trade, and an equally noticeable increase in apologies given. While this has not happened without large debates and opposition, it can be seen as signs that a new narrative, pushed especially by popular campaigns such as Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter, is gaining ground. This thesis tracks the demands and apologies over time, and uses the data to look at and discuss what has changed over time. Noticeable trends are a shift in where the demands come from, an increase in non-governmental institutions such as universities and banks who apologize, as well as an increase in reparations paid – which are all ultimately caused or heavily impacted by the increase in demands from within Britain itself.

**Keywords:** Britain, apologies, slavery, transatlantic slave trade, reparations.

## Sammendrag

I Storbritannia har det i løpet av de siste 25 årene vært en dramatisk oppgang i krav om unnskyldninger for den transatlantiske slavehandelen, og en like dramatisk oppgang i unnskyldninger som har blitt gitt. Selv om dette ikke har skjedd uten debatt og opposisjon er det fremdeles et tegn på at en ny nasjonal fortelling, særlig fremmet av populære protestbevegelser som Rhodes Must Fall og Black Lives Matter, vinner fram. Denne avhandlingen sporer kravene og unnskyldningene over tid, og bruker disse dataene til å se og diskutere hva som har endret seg over tid. Viktige endringene er et skifte i hvor kravene kommer fra, et oppsving i antallet ikke-statlige institusjoner som universiteter eller banker som unnskylder seg, samt en økning i reparasjoner som blir gitt – som alle sammen er enten forårsaket eller sterkt påvirket av økningen i krav som kommer innenfra Storbritannias egne grenser.

**Nøkkelord:** Storbritannia, unnskyldninger, slaveri, transatlantisk slavehandel, reparasjoner.

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# Introduction

## Historical context

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonial powers transported an estimated 10 to 12 million Africans from their home continent, across the Atlantic Ocean, to the Americas where the survivors were sold as slaves. It was one part of what was known as the “triangular trade”, and is known as the “transatlantic slave trade” due to the ocean crossing. Britain was a crucial part of that trade, dominating it between 1640 and 1807, and accounted for roughly 25-30% of the trade alone with an estimated 3,1 million Africans transported.<sup>1</sup> The British state was not only an important investor of the slave system, but also owned slaves.<sup>2</sup>

The British officially abolished the slave trade by passing the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1807, after almost 20 years of lobbying, and from the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1807 “all manner of dealing and trading in the purchase, sale, barter, or transfer of slaves or of persons intending to be sold, transferred, used, or dealt with as slaves, practiced or carried in, at, or from any part of the coast or countries of Africa shall be abolished, prohibited and declared to be unlawful”.<sup>3</sup> However, this only banned the trade of slaves – owning slaves became illegal more than 25 years later, in 1834, when the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 came into force. As a part of the final abolition 20 million pounds sterling were paid as compensation to the owners who had to free their slaves.<sup>4</sup>

The trade had massive consequences. For the European slave traders, the people owning and using slaves, and the many workers connected to the trade in one way or another, the institution of slavery could give huge monetary gains. The gains did not consist of the sale of slaves alone, but also the sale of goods such as cotton or sugar produced with slave labor, the building of ships, taxation of the various products, and various other avenues.<sup>5</sup> The British state thus earned considerable wealth due to slavery, just like the royal family and institutions

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives. «Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade,» 2015, updated 18 June, 2023. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records/>

<sup>2</sup> Beckles, Hilary McD, *Britain's Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide* (University Press of the West Indies, 2013), 163

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives. «Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade»

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives. «Slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade»

<sup>5</sup> Howard-Hassmann, Rhoda E., “Reparations for the Slave Trade: Rhetoric, Law, History and Political Realities,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 41, nr. 3 (2007): 444

such as merchant houses, banks, insurance companies, and the Church of England.<sup>6</sup> At a larger scale, the trade also contributed to Western development. While slavery was not the only factor and not sufficient to start the process of Western industrialization on its own, the money from the trade improved the economy, which might have provided the impetus for technological innovation in Britain – or, at the very least, hastened it.<sup>7</sup>

While it gained Britain and other Western powers, the trade had devastating consequences for the Africans involved – on both sides of the Atlantic. The slaves themselves were treated inhumanely and suffered much, creating a collective trauma. Furthermore, there were also victims back in Africa. The immediate victims were the families of those who were enslaved, but the removal of millions of people also created large-scale social and economic consequences.<sup>8</sup> It also changed the political configuration: as slave-raiding became lucrative and a warrior class occasionally replaced the previously ruling administrative class.<sup>9</sup>

Much has changed since then. The British Empire has first expanded and then fallen apart, geopolitics have changed, expectations and the role of the government have changed, and the mechanisms of domination have changed too. New narratives about the past have been created and contested, and new discussions have arisen: in an increasingly globalized world with instant global communication, it is both harder to hide injustices and harder to avoid confronting them. Other things have changed less, however: the (descendants of the) victims of the slave trade became the victims of colonialism and of racist laws, and arguably still suffer the consequences.<sup>10</sup>

This creates conflicts, both within and between states. While the conflicts are superficially different, as they are between different groups and different states and institutions, they all have in common that descendants of the victims ask for recognition – and often the formal equivalent, namely an official apology and reparations for the injustices committed against their ancestors.

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<sup>6</sup> Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt*, 163

<sup>7</sup> Howard-Hassmann, "Reparations for the Slave Trade", 445

<sup>8</sup> Collste, Göran, *Global Rectificatory Justice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 97

<sup>9</sup> Howard-Hassmann, "Reparations for the Slave Trade", 442

<sup>10</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 97

These demands have taken various forms. While many Western powers were invested in the trade, some were more powerful and impactful than others – and, as a result, they receive more demands and criticism than others. Considering Britain was a very important slave trader and also colonized the Caribbean with its many former plantations, it is also one of the countries which receives the most demands. This is seen, for example, when several Caribbean nations created a “ten-point action plan” with a list of demands primarily aimed at and referencing Britain.<sup>11</sup>

However, not all demands are aimed towards states. Demands for reparations are aimed at the entities who committed the wrongful acts in the first place, and while they are therefore usually directed towards governments, this is not always the case. Both the British state and British corporations utilized the law in order to enslave Africans, displacing natives and establishing colonies, and corporations and institutions such as banks profited due to the trade and were powerful allies of the state.<sup>12</sup> In the words of then Prime Minister Blair, “British industry and ports were intimately intertwined in it”,<sup>13</sup> something which has led to demands that these institutions should also apologize and take responsibility for their past as well.

Much has been written about the topic as well. Considerable critical research into Britain’s past and participation in the slave trade was published from the 1970s onwards, and paved the way for a public reckoning of the ways the slave trade affected Britain.<sup>14</sup> After the Cold War, the issue became even more important, and in the last 20-25 years the debate about apologies, as well as the amount of apologies, has exploded. This has brought with it much literature as well, from a variety of angles: Tom Bentley has concerned himself with “Empires of Remorse” (published in 2016) and how changing narratives influence European states to apologize to their former colonies, Mihaela Mihai and Mathias Thaler have written “On the Uses And Abuses of Political Apologies” (2014), and a variety of other researchers have written papers or books on specific apologies or lack thereof. The most important one,

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<sup>11</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice». Accessed 14 May 2024.

<https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice/>

<sup>12</sup> Atilés-Osoria José, “Colonial State Crimes and the CARICOM Mobilization for Reparation and Justice,” *State Crime Journal* 7, nr. 2 (2018): 357-358

<sup>13</sup> UK Parliament. «Slavery: Bicentenary of the Abolition». Accessed 14 May 2024.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldhansrd/text/61128-wms0005.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Mihai, Mihaela, “When the State Says “Sorry”: State Apologies as Exemplary Political Judgement,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, nr. 2 (2013): 200-201

considering the topic, is Ana Lucia Araujo, who in 2017 was the first to compile a transnational and comparative narrative history of demands for reparations for slavery.<sup>15</sup>

### Thesis statement and structure

Very little of the previous literature surrounding (demands for) official apologies focuses exclusively on Britain, however. Although Araujo covers the British part of the history of demands for reparations, she also writes about multiple other countries such as the US, Brazil, and Cuba, in addition to an extensive history of the trade itself. Nor is there much literature covering non-governmental apologies, which have had a staggering rise in the last decade. What is also lacking is a shorter overview of the recent history of demands for apologies and apologies given, as well as the most important changes which have occurred during that period.

The purpose of this thesis is to do exactly that: focusing exclusively on Britain in the last 25 years, it will look at the different demands for apologies and the different apologies given, before trying to determine what has changed.

In order to do this, it will provide a timeline of different demands for apologies, different apologies from British entities, and reactions to both of those. The various events have been analyzed and the timeline has been divided into several periods corresponding to changes over time, but the primary purpose is to provide context and material to draw trends from. The timeline is then used to identify and discuss overarching trends and changes which have occurred, as well as some possible reasons behind them. These trends include geographical changes, changes in who demands and gives apologies, as well as an increase in reparations offered.

To be able to discuss the findings properly, context is needed. The thesis will therefore start with a theory section concerning how narratives about the past change over time, what official apologies are, as well as some differences between state and company apologies. Then, the common arguments used in demands for apologies and reparations are covered. The final section will look into changes in society and public opinion within the last 25 years, and how

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<sup>15</sup> Araujo, Ana Lucia, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 5

this can have affected the public's support for, or opposition to, apologies. This will be useful in order to understand why some entities might consider it useful to apologize, while others do not.

Following this, there will be a timeline of various apologies and demands for apologies. This has been divided into several sections: the years up to and including 2001, 2002-2012, 2013-2014, 2015-2020, and 2021-2023, as these roughly match up to different "periods of apologies". The timeline is used as it provides a more comprehensive view than sorting the apologies by who has given them, which allows discussions of multiple apologies given by multiple actors at the same time. It also makes it easier to compare trends over time.

Finally, there will be a section dedicated to the trends, as well as a discussion about them. Primarily, three trends can be drawn: a geographical move in where the demands come from, a shift in who is thought responsible, and finally a noticeable increase in reparations. All three of these trends are connected to a change in narratives and the issue of apologizing becoming more important within Britain itself, helped by social media campaigns Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter.

### Research methodology and sources

The thesis will consist of three main parts, each based on different sources. The first one is context: what official apologies are, how public opinion towards them has changed over time, and what arguments there are for and against apologizing. In this part I will mainly use secondary literature and draw on existing debates surrounding official apologies, British narratives about the past, as well as literature exploring the specific issue of apologizing for the transatlantic slave trade. There is a vast amount of material to take from here, as much has been written about Britain's involvement in the slave trade, official apologies by governments and other institutions, as well as apologies for Britain's role in the slave trade specifically. Some of it is noticeably biased one way or the other, and efforts have been made to tone those biases down, and if possible avoid the most subjective sources – or, if that was not an option, avoid using the most subjective parts.

The second is a timeline and a periodization of important events regarding apologies for the transatlantic slave trade, going from the late 90's to early 2023. This section is made for two reasons: first, there is no recent list of public apologies for involvement in the slave trade, and secondly it provides important contexts and allows me to find and discuss changes over time. I have also divided the timeline into different periods, as this allows for an easier overview and makes it easier to draw trends. This periodization is therefore in itself an important part of the research.

Older events such as the 2001 Durban conference or Blair's 2006/2007 statement of regret are extensively covered and discussed by secondary sources, and are easy to find. However, more recent apologies have not been covered by much academic literature yet. In order to compile the last ten years of the timeline I therefore rely mainly on primary sources such as reports, speeches and official statements, but also articles from a wide range of newspapers as well as the webpages of the various institutions. Much of this research has been done by searching for events online using Google, finding news articles about them, and using the information found in those articles. This can be the news articles themselves, if they include relevant statements given to the press, but they might also cite or link primary sources such as reports which can be used. They might also mention similar relevant events, which can then be researched further.

This approach has some issues. The main problem is the amount of information available, as well as how difficult it is to be able to find everything. It is therefore very likely that some events have not been included, especially if they are more than a few years back in time. However, those events are likely to have been minor, and the timeline should therefore be complete enough to draw and discuss tentative trends and changes from. It also allows the use of a wide range of primary sources, as well as the use of sources not discussed in secondary literature.

The third section will consist of drawing and discussing the tentative trends. Using the timeline and secondary literature it will try to determine what has changed over time, both about who demands the apologies – geographically as well as which groups or institutions – as well as who gives the apologies and who might deny them for what reasons. It also discusses the issue of reparations given alongside the apologies, what they consist of, and how those have changed over time, and includes a chart covering when what reparations have been

given by whom. The timeline thus sorts the important events and provides the raw material, while this section seeks to analyze the material and point out the most important developments.

## Context and theory

In order to understand why apologies regarding the transatlantic slave trade are important and how they have changed, it is necessary to take a look at the wider political and societal context around them. Changes in context are also mirrored in changes in the apologies or demands for apologies, connecting the two even more intimately together. The context is, in this thesis, divided into three parts: one about changing narratives about the past, one about general official apologies and their function, and one about apologies specifically for the transatlantic slave trade.

### Changing narratives about the past

A large part of nation-building is constructing stories about the past, usually by highlighting specific events and people and giving them especial – often symbolic – value. These stories are important to create cohesion, an idea about the nation's self, domestic and international legitimacy, as well as reifying societal structures.<sup>16</sup> Narratives thus become a part of the national culture, and appear in many places – in school curriculums, political rhetoric, and museums, but also in street names, statues, or remembrance days for specific events deemed important.<sup>17</sup> The past is therefore brought into and made relevant for the present, as certain events, persons and ideals are celebrated, while others might not be mentioned. Especially shameful episodes have traditionally been left uncommemorated and ignored, creating gaps of silence.

However, ideas about the past are not set in stone and change over time. Issues seen as acceptable in the past might therefore be considered harmful today, and vice versa. This also affects political legitimation, especially if the issues at hand are large and have affected many

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<sup>16</sup> Bentley, Tom, *Empires of Remorse: Narrative, postcolonialism and apologies for colonial atrocity* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016), 11

<sup>17</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 11

– such as wars, genocides, as well as slavery and colonialism. Instead of remaining faithful to older ideas, many politicians today emphasize “learning the lessons” of history in order to be better at the present,<sup>18</sup> a new form of legitimation which Jeffrey Olick calls the “politics of regret”.<sup>19</sup>

Olick further argues that this “lesson-learning” is dependent on the new narratives. As time passes and new voices are heard, new (counter)narratives are created. Typically, disenfranchised groups within societies produce alternative historical narratives which emphasize different aspects of the past and often criticize other – usually more official – narratives for perceived wrongs, and in this way try to fill their silences.<sup>20</sup> In the beginning those peripheral groups challenge the ideas held by the majority, but given time the newer claims can be adopted by larger parts of the population.

This gives rise to conflict. Narratives are ingrained with culture, and attempts at changing them are therefore usually met with a certain resistance. Depending on how controversial the issue is, one can have claims and counterclaims, memories and counter-memories. Contemporary politics are no exception, and some of the different narratives have made their way to the very top in discursive wars about past legacies.<sup>21</sup>

In the UK, it is especially the British Empire which is surrounded by competing and conflicting narratives.<sup>22</sup> Being so geographically large, with so many cultures, and lasting such a long time, the Empire gives rise to a range of controversial topics – with the slave trade being one of them. With such a large impact there are also different views of it, as one can cherry-pick good or bad aspects. Opinions about the Empire thus range from it being an engine of modernization to being a vehicle of exploitation.<sup>23</sup> In particular, populist right-wing politicians have conjured images of a glorious imperial past, and this way tapped into colonial nostalgia – also in recent times, and especially before the Brexit vote.<sup>24</sup> While these grandiose visions usually revolve around the Empire’s golden age when it controlled India and large

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<sup>18</sup> Olick, Jeffrey. K., *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2007), 122

<sup>19</sup> Olick, 122

<sup>20</sup> Olick, 129

<sup>21</sup> Olick, 139

<sup>22</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 12

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, Ashley, *British Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4

<sup>24</sup> Koegler, Caroline, Malreddy, Pavan K, and Marlana Tronicke., “The colonial remains of Brexit: Empire nostalgia and narcissistic nationalism,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, nr 5 (2020): 586



amounts of Africa as well as WWII – in other words, events which happened long after the transatlantic slave trade – critique towards any imperial epoch can be seen as a threat to white nationalism, as accepting part of the Empire’s modus operandi as harmful to others would be damaging to the nationalistic self.<sup>25</sup> The debate surrounding empire – and especially its nastier parts – is therefore bound to create conflict instead of coherence, and while there is little debate about the fact that the slave trade was morally bad, apologizing for it is a widely contested issue. This is seen in polls as well: in a 2023 survey where Lord Ashcroft Polls asked about whether King Charles should apologize for slavery, 56% of the voters in England were against and 27% for.<sup>26</sup>

The way narratives are used and shaped has also changed over time. The most important of those changes in the last 25 years is the appearance of social media. Historically, most power has been concentrated among the government and traditional media such as newspapers or TV, but the rise of social media has shifted it more towards individuals,<sup>27</sup> and has thus given individuals a larger influence compared to companies and other institutions.<sup>28</sup> This has resulted in a range of effects. Marginalized groups have been given a voice – which is important in the creation of new narratives –, and citizen journalism and digital activism have stated events as diverse as the Arab Spring and the Black Lives Matter movement. Social media has also made it faster to transmit opinions, as well as easier to discuss them with others and hear what others think about them, and in this way connect people and create global communities which would not otherwise have existed. They have therefore made it easier for your everyday person to become and be part of a movement and to show collective expressions of sentiment. In addition, they allow for an easier way to coordinate and direct collective action.<sup>29</sup> This does not mean all campaigns are successes, however: while social media does allow citizens to show their engagement with a certain issue or cause, the campaigns do not have a single preordained outcome.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Koegler, Malreddy and Tronicke, 587

<sup>26</sup> Lord Ashcroft. ““It might seem a strange system in this day and age, but it works” – my polling on the UK and the monarchy.” Lord Ashcroft Polls, published 4th May 2023. <https://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2023/05/it-might-seem-a-strange-system-in-this-day-and-age-but-it-works-my-polling-on-the-uk-and-the-monarchy/>

<sup>27</sup> Dubow Talitha, Devaux, Axelle and Catriona Manville, “Civic Engagement: How Can Digital Technology Encourage Greater Engagement in Civil Society?”, *RAND Corporation* (2017): 2

<sup>28</sup> Whelan Glen, Moon, Jeremy and Bettina Grant., “Corporations and Citizenship Arenas in the Age of Social Media,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 118, nr. 4 (2013): 778

<sup>29</sup> Shirky, Clay, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, nr. 1 (2011): 35

<sup>30</sup> Shirky, 29

New movements are not merely a product of social media, however. Some of them are caused by specific incidents: for example, although the Black Lives Matter campaign existed before the death of George Floyd, it became a much larger movement afterwards.<sup>31</sup> Others appear when new groups organize. This is a process which has gone on for several decades now, ever since the labor movement became fragmented and replaced by groups concerned with issues like the environment, LGBTQ+, gender equality, and more.<sup>32</sup> This matches a rise in “identity politics”, where people with a specific identity – be it based on race, regionality, sexuality, social background, or class – band together in political alliances, usually spurred by shared grievances, and then usually try to blame a political actor for said complaints and demand change and/or compensation.<sup>33</sup>

These “identity politics” and new social movements tend to have their own narratives about society and its past, created by their different values and viewpoints. Considering the various groups and movements need to win support of others – be it the government or the general public – in order to realize their goals, these narratives also often appear on social media, where they are frequently discussed and can come into conflict with each other. In this way, “identity politics” can become a national issue<sup>34</sup> – as is the case with the discussion around the British Empire, its legacy, and the slave trade.

Apologies need to fit into this debate between narratives and counternarratives. According to Tom Bentley, this is usually done by only addressing certain aspects of the past.<sup>35</sup> Instead of apologizing for colonialism in its entirety, only especially egregious examples of violence such as massacres and genocides are apologized for. In this way, these acts are seen as outliers rather than colonialism’s modus operandi, and are made non-threatening to the national narrative.<sup>36</sup>

In this respect, slavery can be an issue. While the transatlantic slave trade ended far earlier than the British Empire did, it was such a fundamental part of the colonial enterprise that it

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<sup>31</sup> Britannica. “Black Lives Matter.” 2024, accessed 14 May 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Lives-Matter>

<sup>32</sup> Fuchs, Christian, *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory* (Westminster: University of Westminster Press, 2020), 197

<sup>33</sup> Klandermans, P. G., “Identity Politics and Politicized Identities: Identity Processes and the Dynamics of Protest,” *Political Psychology* 35, nr. 1 (2014): 4

<sup>34</sup> Klandermans, 4

<sup>35</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 16

<sup>36</sup> Bentley, 16

cannot be considered an outlier – and it has lasting effects to the present day. According to Tom Bentley, taking responsibility for the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences can therefore be a threat to the national image. An apology can in this way receive backlash, especially among conservatives, who might not agree with it.<sup>37</sup> The 2023 Lord Ashcroft Poll summarizes it succinctly: “the issue is one on which it would be easy to annoy the wider public without ever satisfying activists’ demands”.<sup>38</sup> While denying or glorifying the transatlantic slave trade is difficult to impossible in society at large, counter-arguments abound, and apologizing for the transatlantic slave trade is suddenly not as easy as it might appear at a first glance.

### Official apologies and their functions

Official apologies – defined by Lisa Storm Villadsen as “statements issued by an official on behalf of a public collective (such as a nation state or a government) to apologize for wrongful deeds done in the past”<sup>39</sup> – themselves are also complex and change depending on context. An apology for the misbehavior of one specific politician will be handled differently than a failure of the entire government, and a recent scandal will receive a different response than an event which happened many years ago. Apologies relating to the transatlantic slave trade are, understandably enough, in the latter category – namely “apologies for a historic injustice”, which has been defined as a “formal attempt [by a state] to redress a severe and long-standing harm against an innocent group” by Blatz, Schumann and Ross.<sup>40</sup> This is a rather vague definition, which is warranted considering apologizing can be done in a wide range of ways. Public verbal statements or speeches might be the most common and well-known one, but legislative resolutions, joint declarations, documents and reports, days of observance, pardons, monuments and memorials or even the changing of geographical names are other ways in which it can be done.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bentley, 46

<sup>38</sup> Lord Ashcroft, “It might seem a strange system in this day and age, but it works,” <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2023/05/it-might-seem-a-strange-system-in-this-day-and-age-but-it-works-my-polling-on-the-uk-and-the-monarchy/>

<sup>39</sup> Villadsen, Lisa. S., “Speaking on Behalf of Others: Rhetorical Agency and Epideictic Functions in Official Apologies,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, nr. 1 (2008): 25

<sup>40</sup> Blatz, Craig W., Schumann, Karina and Michael Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” *Political Psychology* 30, nr. 2 (2009): 221

<sup>41</sup> Weyeneth, Robert. R., “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” *The Public Historian* 23, nr. 3 (2001):20

This means that official apologies differ from common interpersonal apologies in many ways. Unlike interpersonal apologies, official apologies are formal and public, and their performance is usually an event of some kind. Another important difference is that the apologizer's responsibility is far less than when apologizing for a personal misdeed. The person apologizing is the mouthpiece or representative for a particular group or institution, and may have had no personal role in the event at all, neither directly nor indirectly.<sup>42</sup> This fact is also debated when it comes to apologizing for the slave trade. Considering the trade was abolished two centuries ago, different groups disagree about how much of a responsibility current leaders have, if they are responsible at all. This showcases another difference: unlike interpersonal apologies, official apologies are aimed at different groups at the same time. Present and future audiences, members of the non-victimized majority – who might know little about the injustice which is being apologized for –, and the previously victimized group are all important, and might have very different opinions about the injustice and how it should be handled.<sup>43</sup>

While official apologies are usually connected to the government and politicians, this is not always the case. Corporations, churches, or NGOs can also offer official apologies. Although these apologies might not necessarily be about the same topics as government apologies – companies are likely to apologize for faulty products, for example – there are many similarities, and the definition of a corporate apology is also almost identical to a government apology: a corporate leader speaks in a way that “aims for a future reconciliation between the offending party and those whom [...] the apologizer's firm have harmed or offended”.<sup>44</sup> As with government apologies, this leader might not have committed the harm themselves, and the apologies can have a political significance, at least if they affect or implicate the public sphere.<sup>45</sup>

However, there are still major differences. The first one being responsibility: the state is responsible for creating and upholding laws as well as for society at large, and it exemplifies the nation in a way companies do not. In the context of the slave trade, while companies and

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<sup>42</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 49

<sup>43</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” 221

<sup>44</sup> Koehn, Daryl, “Why Saying “I’m Sorry” Isn’t Good Enough: The Ethics of Corporate Apologies,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 23, nr. 2 (2013): 240

<sup>45</sup> Mihai Mihaela and Mathias Thaler, eds., *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15

institutions profited from it, it was the state which ultimately made chattel slavery legal, and thus has the ultimate responsibility. Second, companies are usually more concerned with current events.<sup>46</sup> While the state relies on taxes, fees, fines, etc. to generate income, companies are dependent on consumers buying their products – and they usually have competition. A concerned citizen can easily buy products from a different brand, or possibly stop buying them altogether, but has a much harder time not paying taxes as a form of protest. Companies thus need to react quickly if issues arise and need to be addressed. Their responses are, however, quite similar to nations: a defensive reaction where they try to fend off or deny the accusation and protect the brand, or an admission of the mistake or wrongdoing and an apology.<sup>47</sup>

All official apologies also serve the same functions: a narrative function where a wrongdoing is identified and responsibility is taken for wrongful harm, a disavowal of the harmful or offending act, and finally a commitment where the apologizer vows to repair the wrongs if possible and appropriate.<sup>48</sup> Robert Weyeneth argues they can also be a way to ask for forgiveness from those who have been harmed by previous mistakes,<sup>49</sup> be a way to provide closure and end a difficult chapter of history,<sup>50</sup> or be an attempt at upholding an institutional reputation or protect a brand.<sup>51</sup> Alice MacLachlan adds that another important function is to instill trust in the government or company, both for the victims and as a way to create accountability in case mistakes have been made – even if this accountability is due to public pressure or legal coercion rather than changed and better morals.<sup>52</sup>

MacLachlan further argues that the most important and most divisive of these functions might be the narrative function, as apologies can alter or “correct” previous narratives and “set them straight”, representing a change in the public moral.<sup>53</sup> This is also the most controversial part of political apologies, as changing narratives tends to provoke debates. Occasionally majorities will oppose apologies against historical injustices, with a frequent argument being

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<sup>46</sup> Koehn, “Why Saying ‘I’m Sorry’ Isn’t Good Enough,” 242

<sup>47</sup> Xia, Lan, “Effects of Companies’ Responses to Consumer Criticism in Social Media,” *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 17, nr. 4 (2013): 75

<sup>48</sup> MacLachlan, Alice, “The State of ‘Sorry’: Official Apologies and their Absence,” *Journal of Human Rights* 9, nr. 3 (2010): 376

<sup>49</sup> Weyeneth, “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” 21

<sup>50</sup> Weyeneth, 23

<sup>51</sup> Weyeneth, 22

<sup>52</sup> MacLachlan, Alice, “‘Trust Me, I’m Sorry’: The Paradox of Public Apology,” *The Monist* 98, nr. 4 (2015): 443

<sup>53</sup> MacLachlan, 442

that an apology implicates them in the act.<sup>54</sup> This creates issues on various levels. For one, it might hinder apologies from being given at all, as political apologies are inevitably strategic as well as principled, and elected politicians consider public opinion before apologizing – and might not apologize if it is an unpopular issue.<sup>55</sup> If an apology provokes a backlash from the majority – or even just a larger part of the public – it can also be damaging to the victims, and in this way be negative.<sup>56</sup> However, this is also part of what makes apologies effective – for them to have an impact, they need to have some risk or cost. This can be both financial (such as money spent on reparations), a political toll, a symbolic stain on a nation’s reputation, or several at the same time.<sup>57</sup> Changing a narrative and “setting history straight” would not be such a victory if it was easy.

The compensation aimed at repairing the wrongs can also be controversial. How these repairs are done is less clear, as there are multiple ways to approach them, but the fact that there needs to be a commitment towards repairing is clear – and if there is none, the apology might be considered an empty gesture.<sup>58</sup> However, these repairs can be financially expensive, and it can occasionally – as is the case with the transatlantic slave trade – be hard to know who the victims are and how they can best be compensated.

All these functions mean that merely apologizing does not guarantee that all parts are satisfied. Tone, formality and setting matter as well, and the setup of the apology also changes how it is interpreted.<sup>59</sup> While apologies can be written text only, such as announcements from companies or official statements from the government, most official public apologies are also a performance, usually a speech. Who makes the speech or announcement, who is invited to watch or comment, where the apologizing takes place and which elements are included, the sequence of actions and the acting itself are all parts of this staging and play a role in how the apology is perceived.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” 222

<sup>55</sup> Mihai and Thaler, *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies*, 19

<sup>56</sup> Mihai and Thaler, 174

<sup>57</sup> Mihai and Thaler, 23

<sup>58</sup> Weyeneth, “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” 29

<sup>59</sup> Koehn, “Why Saying “I’m Sorry” Isn’t Good Enough,” 240 and Cels, Sanderijn, “Interpreting Political Apologies: The Neglected Role of Performance,” *Political Psychology* 36, nr. 3 (2015): 355

<sup>60</sup> Cels, 356-357

In addition to this are the spoken or written words which make up the actual apology, and which need a certain number of elements in order to be “good”. Blatz, Schumann and Ross list these elements as:

- 1) Remorse
- 2) Acceptance of responsibility
- 3) An admission of injustice or wrongdoing
- 4) Acknowledging harm or suffering
- 5) Promises to behave better in the future
- 6) Offers of repair<sup>61</sup>

Other researchers list similar elements, but might phrase them differently, add or remove an element, merge them or split them, or add different angles. Tom Bentley adds the elements “self-condemnation” and “recognition that a transgression took place”, and uses the phrasing “efforts at achieving forgiveness” rather than “offers of repair”.<sup>62</sup> According to Mihai and Thaler all good apologies imply a similar kind of story, however: the actions or policies in question were wrong, a recipient was harmed due to them, the speaker disavows them and makes some kind of commitment to do better and try to repair the harms done.<sup>63</sup> These points match with the apology’s previously mentioned narrative function.

All of this makes apologies powerful political tools. An apology can be a good way of resolving conflicts and repairing damaged relationships between groups and even nations.<sup>64</sup> It can also assign responsibility and absolve victims from blame, ensures the victimized group that the government has changed and upholds previously violated moral principles, validates the victims’ pain and suffering, and tries to indicate that the government values the victims and is willing to help them.<sup>65</sup> Repairs are also often given as a way to demonstrate the apology is sincere. If these criteria are met, it should make the victims feel validated and restore their trust in the government, an institution, or a company, and an apology is therefore also often desired by the victims or victimized group.

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<sup>61</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” 221

<sup>62</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 34

<sup>63</sup> Mihai and Thaler, *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies*, 14

<sup>64</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” 220

<sup>65</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, 222

## Apologizing for the transatlantic slave trade

Apologizing for past wrongs can thus be positive in a range of different ways. This in no way means apologizing is easy, however. That the transatlantic slave trade was an injustice is accepted – and “regretted” – by Western governments, but it is frequently considered too historically distant, too difficult or too complex to deal with. There is no legal responsibility to apologize considering slavery was not legally a crime at the time, and there are no living victims which can claim compensation either. A common reply to the issue is thus that the countries have already done enough to alleviate the injustices, and that the government needs to focus on current issues instead.<sup>66</sup>

There are other ways to deflect demands for apologizing as well. According to Mihai, sidestepping issues of race and racism, focusing on how black Britons live much better today, constructing “slavery” as an independent agent or denying that slavery has implications today are all attempts at stifling critical reflection.<sup>67</sup> Other arguments are how people today did not participate in the injustices, and therefore should not apologize or take the blame.

Other reasons are more closely connected to narratives, as argued by Mihai and Thaler. Apologies can be interpreted as a denigration of one’s country, and therefore resisted.<sup>68</sup> Narratives about living in a “good nation” and having a “good past” are enticing, and an apology for past injustices challenges this perception and can be opposed for that reason.<sup>69</sup> Paired with this is the idea that positive parts of history are glossed over or forgotten:<sup>70</sup> in this case, England’s pioneering role in fighting slavery is usually highlighted as a counternarrative to the slave trade, and as a defense against perceived attempts at rewriting history. This is also evident by the 2023 poll by Lord Ashcroft Polls, which considered “if we’re going back 200 years, we were one of the first countries in the world to outlaw slavery. The British Navy freed 150,000 slaves. Why should we apologise to anyone?” as a “typical” response to the question of whether King Charles should apologize.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross 220

<sup>67</sup> Mihai, “When the State Says “Sorry””, 202

<sup>68</sup> Mihai and Thaler, *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies*, 177

<sup>69</sup> Mihai and Thaler, 178

<sup>70</sup> Mihai, “When the State Says “Sorry””, 201

<sup>71</sup> Lord Ashcroft, “It might seem a strange system in this day and age, but it works,”

<https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2023/05/it-might-seem-a-strange-system-in-this-day-and-age-but-it-works-my-polling-on-the-uk-and-the-monarchy/>



On the other hand are the various arguments for apologizing. Some of these are direct counters to specific arguments against apologizing, such as how one should accept everything one's ancestors or nation has done, not celebrate the good parts and silence the bad. This argument claims that, just as how people can be proud of their past, they should also accept the shame – but not direct responsibility – of previous bad actions.<sup>72</sup>

More importantly, there are claims that there still are victims of the slave trade, usually made by the perceived victims themselves. As a general rule, compensation and reparation is only given to those who were directly affected by the injustice<sup>73</sup> – but descendants can also have a claim if they are able to either prove that they too have suffered as a direct consequence of the original wrong, or that they are entitled to possessions which were wrongly taken from their ancestors.<sup>74</sup> In most cases where groups or nations demand apologies, it is this argument they rely the most on, as can be seen during the Durban conference and in CARICOM's demands, both discussed in the timeline.

A final argument for apologizing is that the current British population might not have participated in it, but might still have benefited from past events.<sup>75</sup> While the exact impact of the slave trade is debated, it has certainly brought profits for many Brits, and these profits can be tracked to the present day. As Aaron Lazare argues, while not guilty themselves, these beneficiaries might have a responsibility towards those who suffered – and possibly still suffer – from the consequences of the misdeeds.

However, it is also difficult to say whether the transatlantic slave trade alone was the cause of many of the present issues mentioned as consequences. Africans were not only sold as slaves to Europeans, but also to Arab nations.<sup>76</sup> African chiefs enslaved people just as Europeans did,<sup>77</sup> and colonialism and Jim Crow laws upheld the racism which slavery started. In this way, it can become difficult to establish the slave trade only as the cause of suffering. This makes the case increasingly complex, as it becomes harder to assess which damages have

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<sup>72</sup> Lazare, Aaron. *On Apology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40

<sup>73</sup> Thompson, Janna. "Historical Injustice and Reparation: Justifying Claims of Descendants," *Ethics* 112, nr. 1 (2011): 116

<sup>74</sup> Thompson, 116

<sup>75</sup> Lazare, *On Apology*, 40

<sup>76</sup> Howard-Hassmann, "Reparations for the Slave Trade", 436

<sup>77</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 97

been done by whom and when, as well as how these harms should eventually be repaired.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the issue is extremely complex, and this gives rise to a wide variety of demands, refusals to apologize, and – especially in recent years – actual apologies.

## **A timeline of demands and apologies**

Over the last 25 years, a wide variety of demands have been aimed towards Britain, along with an equally wide variety of refusals and apologies given by British entities. Much has changed during that time, both regarding who demands apologies, and who is supposed to be giving them, and the reactions to the demands have also changed.

In order to properly discuss what has changed, one needs an overview of the events which have happened during this period. Considering there is no easily available overview covering only British apologies towards slavery up until recent times, I have therefore made a timeline of the major events regarding apologies, reparations, and the demands for these, as well as some context around and reactions to the various events. Minor events such as small activist groups making unanswered demands are not always included, as this has happened regularly over the last 25 years and will clutter the sections.

Although there are some things that remain constant, I propose that the last 25 years can be divided into five different time periods depending on who is demanding what, as well as what reactions they have received. These periods are:

- Before 2002, when African countries demanded an apology from European ex-colonial powers, and the issue was debated to no effect
- 2002-2012, which were relatively quiet apart from 2006/2007 and the British bicentenary for abolishing slavery
- 2013-2014, when Caribbean nations/CARICOM started to demand apologies
- 2015-2020, when the issue was raised by the British general public during the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter protests and several apologies were given

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<sup>78</sup> Thompson, “Historical Injustice and Reparation,” 116

- 2021-2023, when reports commissioned in 2020 were finished, further reparations were made, and individual responsibility became more important

Further discussion about the changes happening in each period will be done in the next section, covering the trends. However, before trends can be drawn, the data and context they draw on and are discussing needs to be explained.

### Before 2002: African demands and the Durban conference

In 1999, Liverpool was the first city in Britain to make a formal apology for its role in the slave trade following a motion by Councillor Mirna Juarez. This was a controversial move, mostly because it was considered “too little, too late”, and no reparations were paid nor initiatives made. However, it was the first time British (local) government decided to “apologise” and offer “our unreserved remorse for the history of slave trading”.<sup>79</sup>

The more important event in this era was the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa – henceforth referred to as the “Durban conference”. Slavery and the slave trade were one of the major points of debate, and much of the conference was spent discussing the issue of rectification and reparations for colonial injustice.<sup>80</sup>

To understand the Durban conference and the demands in question, we need to look back to 1992 and 1993, when African leaders, intellectuals and other public personalities met in Abuja, Nigeria, for the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations. The result was the Abuja Proclamation, which among others underlined that African nations still suffered enduring consequences of the slave trade, and therefore had a right to compensation. They also argued that Germany had paid compensation to Holocaust victims, and thus offered repairs for crimes perpetrated before they became formally illegal.<sup>81</sup> Emphasizing that “what matters is not the guilt but the responsibility” of former slave-trading and colonizing powers,

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<sup>79</sup> BBC, “Liverpool’s slavery apology,” 15th February 2007, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/liverpool/content/articles/2007/02/15/abolition\\_liverpool\\_apology\\_feature.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/liverpool/content/articles/2007/02/15/abolition_liverpool_apology_feature.shtml)

<sup>80</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 90

<sup>81</sup> Craemer, Thomas, “International Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade,” *Journal of Black Studies* 49, nr. 7 (2016): 696

they demanded apologies and compensations for the injustices they had suffered.<sup>82</sup> No exact demands were made regarding reparations – “compensation for injustice need not necessarily be paid only in capital transfer but could include service to the victims or other forms of restitution”<sup>83</sup> – but suggestions such as the right for slave descendants to return to Africa, debt relief, more political representation for African people and a permanent African seat in the UN Security Council are mentioned.<sup>84</sup>

The demands debated in Durban eight years later were thus primarily from Africa and regarding African nations – who did not get their demands met. Western delegates, especially from the US, Britain, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal – the latter four being some of the main historical slave trading powers in the EU –, argued against a formulation which stated that the slave trade was a crime against humanity at the time it happened, as such a formulation could lead to legal claims for reparations.<sup>85</sup> They also opposed an apology, and a British delegate stated that “even an apology could have damaging consequences”.<sup>86</sup> EU countries supposedly agreed to apologize provided African nations dropped the call for financial reparations and for an admission slavery was a crime against humanity – and claimed the text that some countries were “regretting, or expressing remorse, or presenting apologies” amounted to an apology from the EU.<sup>87</sup> It was also stated explicitly by a spokesman for the EU delegation that the document is “drafted [in a way where] there can’t be any legal consequences”.<sup>88</sup>

There were other blows as well. Not all African nations were united about the matter, and some countries such as Senegal and Nigeria actually stood against reparation claims.<sup>89</sup> In addition, the US withdrew from the conference. While this was due to discussions regarding

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<sup>82</sup> The Abuja Proclamation, 1993, 1

<sup>83</sup> The Abuja Proclamation, 1

<sup>84</sup> The Abuja Proclamation, 2-3

<sup>85</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 93

<sup>86</sup> McGreal, Chris, «Britain blocks EU apology for slave trade,» *The Guardian*, 3rd September 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/03/race.uk>

<sup>87</sup> Castle, Stephen and Alex D. Smith, “Europe’s apology for slavery rules out reparations,” *Independent*, 8th September 2001, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/europe-s-apology-for-slavery-rules-out-reparations-9194249.html>

<sup>88</sup> Castle and Smith, “Europe’s apology for slavery rules out reparations”. *Independent*, 8th September 2001.

<sup>89</sup> Esposito, Eleonora, “The Social Media Campaign for Caribbean Reparations: A Critical Multimodal Investigation”. In *Discourses from Latin America and the Caribbean: Current Concepts and Challenges*, edited by Eleonora Esposito, Carolina Pérez-Arredondo and José Manuel Ferreiro (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 179

Zionism and Palestine rather than slavery and compensation, it had considerable negative impact on the cause.<sup>90</sup>

The final Durban Declaration ended up stating that slavery and the slave trade “should have been” considered a crime at the time they happened, but were not – and thus it both expresses changed morals as well as making sure there was no legal way of claiming compensation.<sup>91</sup>

Neither it is an apology. The Durban Declaration does, however, state that slavery – including the transatlantic slave trade – was an “appalling tragedy in the history of humanity” due to its “abhorrent barbarism” and its “magnitude, organized nature and especially [the] negation of the essence of the victims”. It goes on to say that slavery and the slave trade are “a crime against humanity and should always have been so”.<sup>92</sup> The Declaration also states how the slave trade was a source of enduring racial discrimination, racism and xenophobia, as well as how “Africans and people from African descent, Asians and people from Asian descent and indigenous people” still suffer the consequences.

On page 17 of the Declaration there are also mentions of regret. While they are for more than the slave trade – apartheid, colonialism and genocide are mentioned – both past actions and their enduring consequences are regretted.<sup>93</sup> This is how far the Declaration is willing to go. There is a mention how “some States” have taken further initiative and apologized and paid reparations “where appropriate”, but there are no promises that further states should or ought to do the same. Where the Abuja Declaration asked for rectification, the Durban declaration does not give it.<sup>94</sup> In this respect, the Durban Declaration has been considered toothless, and is not a legally binding document which pushes for further change. On the contrary, it can be seen as an attempt to end the debate with what can be called a tentative victory for the Western powers.

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<sup>90</sup> Esposito, 178-9

<sup>91</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 94

<sup>92</sup> United Nations, “World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration” (Durban 2001), 6

<sup>93</sup> United Nations, “World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration”, 17

<sup>94</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 90

## 2002-2012: Increasing focus within Britain

After 2001, the issue of slavery-related apologies and reparations was silent for several years – and when it was raised again, it was back home in Britain.

The first time the issue was raised was in April 2004, when an Early Day Motion in British Parliament for a “National Memorial Slavery Day” received 121 signatures.<sup>95</sup> The motion was unsuccessful, however, and a national slavery memorial day was not established until 2008, when the government announced that the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August – UNESCO’s day for *International Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition* – would be adopted as a focal date.<sup>96</sup>

While focusing on slavery and its effects, this Memorial Day did not amount to an apology, nor reparation for any damage done. This was no surprise: up until 2006, Prime Minister Blair was dismissive of reparations.<sup>97</sup> However, 2007 marked the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade, an event which was to be celebrated – and which raised the issue of apologies and reparations yet again.

This led to the Church of England apologizing in February 2006. Starting as a plan for commemoration its role behind the abolition of slavery, the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams requested a motion which issued an apology for the church’s complicity in sustaining the trade, as well as profiting from it. The apology was given, but the motion stopped short of endorsing a call for reparations.<sup>98</sup>

The most important event happened when then Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed regret for the British role in the slave trade in 2006/2007. These expressions of regret were repeated several times. A written statement was first leaked in November 2006, and then published in a prominent Black newspaper in March 2007. Furthermore, Blair repeated what he had written after meeting Ghana’s president John Agyekum Kufuor on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2007: “I have said we are sorry and I say it again ... [It is important] to remember what happened in the

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<sup>95</sup> UK Parliament, “Early Day Motions: National Memorial Slavery Day,” 2004. <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/25175>

<sup>96</sup> Anti-Slavery, “UK establishes national slavery memorial day,” 28th January 2008, <https://www.antislavery.org/latest/uk-establishes-national-slavery-memorial-day/>

<sup>97</sup> Beckles, *Britain’s Black Debt*, 194

<sup>98</sup> The Church of England, “The Church and the legacy of slavery,” 19th June 2020, <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/church-and-legacy-slavery>

past, to condemn it and say why it was entirely unacceptable”.<sup>99</sup> This was also as close to an apology as he got: while Blair repeated how the government was “sorry”, he never used the words “apology” or “apologize”.<sup>100</sup>

This is reiterated in the written statement. While the slave trade is called “one of the most inhuman enterprises in history”, the text nevertheless oscillates between glorifying the past and condemning it: “at a time when the capitals of Europe and America championed the enlightenment of man, their merchants were enslaving a continent”, “slavery’s impact on Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and Europe was profound. Britain was the first country to abolish the trade” and “as we recall its abolition, we should also recall our place in its practice”.<sup>101</sup> The text also emphasized that, although “hard to believe”, the slave trade was legal at the time, mentioned prominent abolitionists like Olaudah Equiano and William Wilberforce, and stated how the bicentenary offers a chance “not just to say how profoundly shameful the slave trade was and how we condemn its existence utterly and praise those who fought for its abolition, but also to express our deep sorrow that it ever happened and that it ever could have happened, and to rejoice at the different and better times we live in today.”

It then turns towards the present political situation, announcing a doubling in aid to Africa by 2010, noting how “Britain is playing its full part both through increasing bilateral aid and through international leadership” – but, noticeably, without mentioning the words “reparation” or explicitly saying the aid is a way to make amends.<sup>102</sup> Finally, it mentions how the current government is “investing in tackling inequality in education, health, employment, housing and the criminal justice system in order to ensure a future in which everyone can achieve their full potential”, ending with how the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade should be “a chance for us all to increase understanding of our heritage, celebrate the richness of our diversity and increase our determination to shape the world with the values we share”.<sup>103</sup> “Apologizing” was not mentioned in the written statement either – there merely was an expression of “deep sorrow”.

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<sup>99</sup> Anti-Slavery, “Tony Blair apologizes for Britain’s role in the Slave Trade,” 15th March 2007, <https://www.antislavery.org/tony-blair-apologies-britains-role-slave-trade-2/>

<sup>100</sup> UK Parliament. «Slavery: Bicentenary of the Abolition». <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200607/ldhansrd/text/61128-wms0005.htm>

<sup>101</sup> UK Parliament. «Slavery: Bicentenary of the Abolition».

<sup>102</sup> UK Parliament. «Slavery: Bicentenary of the Abolition».

<sup>103</sup> UK Parliament. «Slavery: Bicentenary of the Abolition».

Whether these statements are considered a proper apology or not is therefore debated. The statement does have many of the criteria for a good apology such as remorse, acceptance of responsibility, admission of injustice, and dissociation of injustice from present system,<sup>104</sup> but is not an outright stated apology, nor does it have any explicit offers of repair. It has therefore been considered a “statement of sorrow” or expression of remorse rather than a full apology by many, and has not been accepted by for example CARICOM.<sup>105</sup>

In contrast to this, in 2007 the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone apologized for slavery in “an emotional and tearful” public performance.<sup>106</sup> The Mayor had previously criticized Tony Blair for not going far enough in his statements – and went further, as he both offered “an apology”, as well as addressing competing narratives: “some say that recognising such a crime is a form of - and I quote - 'national self hate'. But the late Senator Bobby Kennedy often quoted the French writer Albert Camus who wrote: 'I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice'”.<sup>107</sup> He had also invited the well-known American civil rights leader Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was seated close to the speaker.<sup>108</sup> No kinds of reparations were made, however, nor were there promises to improve inequality, make political changes, nor any other initiatives.

The Queen and royal family stayed silent about the matter, and did not apologize or comment about the bicentenary. This was despite calls for the Queen to apologize, most noticeably from the activist group Rendezvous of Victory. The group asked for “an apology of substance, accompanied by educational and other reforms”, including “a change in the rules that govern the global economy”<sup>109</sup> – but the demands were not heeded. After the bicentenary was over, the matter of apologizing also came to a rest for another couple of years.

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<sup>104</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” 227

<sup>105</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice», and Pilkington, Ed, “Caribbean nations prepare demand for slavery reparations”, *The Guardian*, 9th March 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/09/caribbean-nations-demand-slavery-reparations>

<sup>106</sup> Muir, Hugh, «Livingstone weeps as he apologizes for slavery», *The Guardian*, 24th August 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/aug/24/london.humanrights>

<sup>107</sup> Muir, «Livingstone weeps as he apologizes for slavery», *The Guardian*

<sup>108</sup> Cels, “Interpreting Political Apologies” 356

<sup>109</sup> Smith, David, “200 years on, the Queen is told to say sorry for Britain’s role in slave trade”, *The Guardian*, 5th December 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/dec/05/race.monarchy>



## 2013-2016: Caribbean demands and British opposition

This changed in 2013, when the state members of CARICOM – the Caribbean Community and Common Market, mostly consisting of independent Caribbean states and former British colonies – created the Caribbean Reparation Commission (henceforth referred to as “CRC”) in order to establish the legal and ethical case for reparations for harms done during the colonial era.<sup>110</sup> The result of the investigations was the *Reparation Justice Program*, and specifically the ten-point action plan regarding reparations. While the “harms” mentioned are colonial and include native genocide and land dispossession, one of the main “crimes” referred to is slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>111</sup> The list of state crimes is the following:

- 1) [European states] owned and traded enslaved Africans
- 2) They led and coordinated genocidal actions against indigenous communities
- 3) They created the legal, fiscal and financial framework necessary for slavery
- 4) They implemented slavery and genocide as part of their national interests
- 5) After emancipation, they imposed an additional 100 years of colonialism, racism, segregation and racial apartheid
- 6) They imposed an additional 100 years of public policy designed to perpetuate the suffering of slaves and survivors of the genocide
- 7) They have not recognized their crimes nor compensated the victims and descendants<sup>112</sup>

Of the crimes mentioned, three points are tied directly to slavery, and the last point directly to apologizing.

The CRC is also clear about slavery and colonialism still influencing the present, as they see the “persistent racial victimization of the descendants of slavery and genocide as the root cause of their suffering today” and “[recognize] that the persistent harm and suffering experienced today by these victims as the primary cause of development failure in the Caribbean”.<sup>113</sup> This way, they conclude that the current Caribbean population deserves an apology as well as reparations, and that the former colonial powers are liable for the present consequences caused by historic slavery and colonialism.

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<sup>110</sup> Atilés-Osoria, “Colonial State Crimes and the CARICOM Mobilization for Reparation and Justice,” 349

<sup>111</sup> Atilés-Osoria, 349

<sup>112</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice»

<sup>113</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice»

This is reflected in the two overarching agendas of the CRC's *Ten-Point Action Plan*. Part of the justifications for reparations are backwards-looking and highlight European states' responsibility to amend their past crimes, while others are forward-looking and address present conditions and issues.<sup>114</sup> Backwards-looking goals include apologizing, a repatriation program, a knowledge program, establishment of cultural institutions and rehabilitation, while forward-looking goals include a development program, financial and technological support, as well as debt cancellation.

Noticeable here is how the first point of the action plan is a demand for an official apology. The CRC considers Blair's 2006 statement a "statement of regret" rather than a "statement of apology", which they consider a vague and questionable response.<sup>115</sup> This is explicitly mentioned in the first action point as well: "[Statements of regret] represent a refusal to take responsibility for such crimes [and] represent, furthermore, a reprehensible response to the call for apology in that they suggest that victims and their descendants are not worthy of an apology."<sup>116</sup>

Britain's PM and royal family opposed this, and the action plan has not spurred much action in the British government.<sup>117</sup> In a state visit to Jamaica – one of the CARICOM members – in 2015, a year after the action plan was created and the demands were made, then Prime Minister David Cameron rebuffed demands to apologize and pay reparations. While Cameron said slavery was "abhorrent in all its forms", he called for the two countries to "move on from this painful legacy and continue to build the future" instead.<sup>118</sup> Cameron also said he does not think reparations are the best way to deal with the issue. While he offered almost \$454 million to support infrastructure projects as well as \$37,9 million to build a new prison, this can thus not be seen as reparations.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Esposito, "The Social Media Campaign for Caribbean Reparations", 183

<sup>115</sup> Atilés-Osoria, "Colonial State Crimes and the CARICOM Mobilization for Reparation and Justice," 361

<sup>116</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice»

<sup>117</sup> Atilés-Osoria, "Colonial State Crimes and the CARICOM Mobilization for Reparation and Justice," 350

<sup>118</sup> Plucinska, Joanna, "U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron Dismisses Jamaican Demands for Slavery Reparations", *TIME*, 1st October 2015, <https://time.com/4057001/david-cameron-jamaica-reparations/>

<sup>119</sup> Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 177

## 2015-2020: Social media protests and their immediate aftermath

In 2015 and 2016, the protest movement Rhodes Must Fall spread from South Africa to Britain. Although Rhodes Must Fall primarily concerned itself with the legacy of colonialism and Cecil Rhodes as a symbolic figurehead, it also raised attention about institutional racism and British universities' ties to the slave trade,<sup>120</sup> which led to reactions down the road.

Unrelated to the issue about slavery and apologies, 2016 was the year Britain voted to leave the EU. While the Brexit debate was primarily about political issues such as immigration or the national budget, it marked a change in the political landscape and political rhetoric. Most noticeable was an increased cultural divide between the “right” and the “left” – and this divide extends to the issue of apologies and reparations too, something which was especially noticeable during the Black Lives Matter protests.<sup>121</sup>

Brexit did not hinder activists from demanding reparations, however. The Stop the Maangamizi Campaign was launched and called for a parliamentary commission of inquiry for truth and reparatory justice in Britain – without result.<sup>122</sup> Notably, this campaign is related to Africa – Maangamizi being the Swahili term for African Holocaust and continuum of chattel, colonial and neocolonial enslavement. It is therefore the first and only explicitly African campaign to appear since the Durban conference.

In 2017, All Souls College at Oxford launched an annual scholarship for Caribbean students and paid a £100,000 grant to a college in Barbados, in recognition of the college's funding from the wealthy slave owner Christopher Codrington. Later, the Codrington library was also renamed the College library.<sup>123</sup> While never stating the funding and grant were “reparations” and opting to call them “steps to address [Codrington's] problematic legacy”,<sup>124</sup> this happened

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<sup>120</sup> Mohdin, Aamna, “Campaign doesn't end with Rhodes statue, says Oxford group”, *The Guardian*, 18th June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/18/campaign-doesnt-end-with-rhodes-statue-says-oxford-group>

<sup>121</sup> Casalicchio, Emilio, “How a slave trade statue highlights divided Britain”, *Politico*, 8th June 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/how-a-slave-trade-statue-highlights-divided-britain-black-lives-matter-protests-brisol-london/>

<sup>122</sup> Stop The Maangamizi, “About,” <https://stopthemaangamizi.com/>

<sup>123</sup> Carell, Severin, “Glasgow University to pay €20m in slave trade reparations”, *The Guardian*, 23rd August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/23/glasgow-university-slave-trade-reparations>

<sup>124</sup> All Souls College, “All Souls College and the Codrington legacy”, <https://www.asc.ox.ac.uk/news/all-souls-college-and-codrington-legacy>

a year after student protests related to the Rhodes Must Fall movement.<sup>125</sup> This marked the beginning of universities and colleges in Britain addressing their historical ties to former slave traders and the trade itself.

In 2018, then Prince Charles followed Cameron’s line from three years back, and while he condemned “the appalling atrocity of the slave trade” in a speech while visiting Ghana, he did not apologize for it.<sup>126</sup>

In the summer of 2019, Glasgow University apologized for its involvement in the slave trade – in addition to paying £20 million in reparations. The money mostly went to research grants and gifts, as well as funding for a center for development research with the University of the West Indies.<sup>127</sup> The process leading up to this apology started during the Rhodes Must Fall protests, leading Glasgow University to commission a report about their ties to the slave trade, and the apology was made after the conclusions had been published.<sup>128</sup>

In 2020, massive protests broke out again, this time under the rallying cry of Black Lives Matter. Although the campaign was started in the US 2014, it was primarily after the death of George Floyd in May 2020 that people took to the streets – also in Britain. While the George Floyd episode highlighted systemic racism in police forces especially, it also led to a wider discussion around racism and discrimination against the Black community.<sup>129</sup> It also rekindled the British debate about the legacy of slavery and how to handle it.<sup>130</sup>

The protests and demands successfully brought with them apologies. Most of these were from banks or were bank-related, such as the insurance company Lloyd’s of London, but also the

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<sup>125</sup> Adams, Richard, “Oxford college to launch scholarship in attempt to address slavery legacy”, *The Guardian*, 10th November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/nov/10/oxford-all-souls-college-scholarship-slavery-legacy-caribbean-christopher-codrington>

<sup>126</sup> Friel, Mikhaila and Samantha Grindell, “If there’s one thing Charles should do as king, it’s what his mother never did – apologize for the monarchy’s racist past”, *Business Insider*, 4th May 2023, <https://www.insider.com/king-charles-apologize-slavery-royal-family-monarchy-racism-2023-5>

<sup>127</sup> Carell, Severin, “Glasgow University to pay €20m in slave trade reparations”, *The Guardian*

<sup>128</sup> McKenna, Kevin, “As Glasgow University owns up to slavery wealth, others urged to follow”, *The Guardian*, 22nd September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/22/glasgow-university-wealth-from-transatlantic-slave-trade-reparations>

<sup>129</sup> Burns, Sally, “Black Lives Matter: reconsidering systemic racism”, In *Ethical Evidence and Policymaking: Interdisciplinary and International Research*, edited by Ron Iphofen and Dónal O’Mathúna (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), 309

<sup>130</sup> Casalicchio, Emilio, “How a slave trade statue highlights divided Britain”, *Politico*

pub chain Greene King apologized, all of whom were highlighted in the University College London “Legacies of British Slavery” database.<sup>131</sup> Pledges to make amends were also given. Greene King became a member of the Slave Free Alliance, created an anti-racism plan, and now strives for “Everyday Inclusion”.<sup>132</sup> No monetary pledges were given, however, and no repairs were offered – which the company explains with “while we can’t change our past, we can determine the present and the future”.<sup>133</sup>

Lloyd’s of London also said they were sorry and “[condemned] the indefensible wrongdoing that occurred”, and has similar initiatives.<sup>134</sup> According to their website they partnered with various charities – which do not cater directly to minorities, but rather aim to include disadvantaged communities<sup>135</sup> – and launched a Long Term Ethnicity Plan as well as a development program for ethnic minorities.<sup>136</sup> They also have a section on their website about their historical ties to slavery, and the company has taken steps to further explore and represent it, such as creating an online exhibition.<sup>137</sup>

In response to this, the chairman of the CRC Hilary Beckles stated that it was “not enough to say sorry”. Instead, “British institutions should sit down with Caribbean nations to fund development projects – or even consider a sort of “Marshall Plan” to give some of the plundered wealth back.”<sup>138</sup>

Other institutions have done less. The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Barclays were also highlighted by the University College London database,<sup>139</sup> but did not apologize outright. RBS stated it had looked “extensively” into its links to slavery and opened its archives to researchers as well as set up a task force of black and minority ethnic employees to see if

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<sup>131</sup> Ziady, Hanna, “British companies apologize for ties to slavery”, *CNN Business*, 18th June 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/18/business/lloyds-of-london-greene-king-slavery/index.html>

<sup>132</sup> Greene King, “Everyday Inclusion”, <https://www.greeneking.co.uk/our-company/everyday-inclusion/> and Greene King, “Calling Time on Racism”, <https://www.greeneking.co.uk/our-company/calling-time-on-racism/>

<sup>133</sup> Greene King. “Calling Time on Racism”

<sup>134</sup> Ziady, Hanna, “British companies apologize for ties to slavery”, *CNN Business*

<sup>135</sup> Lloyd’s, “Lloyd’s of London Foundation”, <https://www.lloyds.com/about-lloyds/responsible-business/community/lloyds-foundation>

<sup>136</sup> Lloyd’s, “Current actions to promote an inclusive culture”, <https://www.lloyds.com/about-lloyds/culture/lloyds-corporation/diversity-and-inclusion/corporation-summary> and Lloyd’s, “Lloyd’s Accelerate programme”, <https://www.lloyds.com/resources-and-services/learning-at-lloyds/accelerate-programme>

<sup>137</sup> Lloyd’s, “The transatlantic slave trade”, <https://www.lloyds.com/about-lloyds/history/the-trans-atlantic-slave-trade>

<sup>138</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. “Exclusive: “Sorry is not enough”, Caribbean states say of British slavery apologies”, *Reuters*, 19th June 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN23Q10C/>

<sup>139</sup> Ziady, Hanna, “British companies apologize for ties to slavery”, *CNN Business*

internal improvements could be made, but have otherwise stayed silent.<sup>140</sup> Barclays also “examined” its history, and stayed silent, and while they have supported a variety of charities after April 2020 this seems more closely connected to the COVID-19 pandemic than the Black Lives Matter protests.<sup>141</sup> They support Black History Month, but this is also tied to the company’s current “commitment to equality”, which also includes support for different sexualities, disabilities and gender.<sup>142</sup>

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 the Bank of England also apologized. While the institution “was never itself directly involved in the slave trade, [it] is aware of some inexcusable connections involving former Governors and Directors and apologises for them”. It reviewed its collection of images to make sure no Governors or Directors involved with the slave trade remained displayed inside the bank, and committed itself to “improving diversity” and “engaging with staff [...] to help us identify and shape concrete steps that can be taken” to improve inclusivity.<sup>143</sup> Other steps included creating a “Slavery & the Bank” exhibition in the Bank of England Museum, and prominently displaying and promoting it on the bank’s website.<sup>144</sup> No monetary reparations were paid, but one can argue the apology was important considering how it is the UK’s central bank, and thus owned by the government.

The Church of England also restated its position, highlighting and reiterating the fact the Church had already apologized in 2006.<sup>145</sup> Alteration and removal of monuments connected to slave owners was also discussed, a task force to fight racism and ensure racial equality was created, and a statement warning of environmental racism was signed.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, a report about the Church’s links to slavery was commissioned, to be finished three years later.

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<sup>140</sup> Ziady, Hanna, “British companies apologize for ties to slavery”, CNN Business

<sup>141</sup> Barclays, “Our charity partners”. Archived on

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240120004637/https://www.barclays.co.uk/coronavirus/charity-partnerships/>

<sup>142</sup> Barclays, “Black History Month”, <https://www.barclays.co.uk/black-history-month/>

<sup>143</sup> Bank of England, “Statement in relation to the Bank’s historical links to the slave trade”, Published 19th June 2020, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/news/2020/june/statement-in-relation-to-the-banks-historical-links-to-the-slave-trade>

<sup>144</sup> Bank of England, “Slavery & the Bank”, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/museum/whats-on/slavery-and-the-bank>

<sup>145</sup> The Church of England. “The Church and the legacy of slavery”

<sup>146</sup> The Church of England, “New Task Force to ensure action over racism in the Church of England”, 24th June 2020, <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/new-task-force-ensure-action-over-racism-church-england>, and The Church of England, “Bishops warn of “Environmental Racism””. 22nd June 2020, <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/bishops-warn-environmental-racism>

In addition to the apologies, the protests also caused a variety of companies and institutions to research their own past or commission reports investigating their ties to slavery. Alongside the Church of England, several cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow commissioned reports, as well as newspapers such as the Guardian. These reports took years to complete, but led to further apologies and reparations after they were published.

However, the government itself declined to apologize or pay reparations. In August 2020, when urged to by a petition signed by more than 20 000 people, the government's response was that "while reparations are not part of the Government's approach, we feel deep sorrow for the transatlantic slave trade, and fully recognise the strong sense of injustice and the legacy of slavery in the most affected parts of the world".<sup>147</sup> This is in line with previous statements by Blair and Cameron: there is an expression of sorrow, but no explicit apology, and no reparations.

### 2021-2023: Finished reports and beginning reparations

The pandemic and the end of the large Black Lives Matter protests were in no way the end of the discussions surrounding slavery and demands for apologies and reparations. While merely a few companies and institutions had apologized in 2020, more had started internal investigations spurred by demands, and the reports were finished one by one.

At the same time, Caribbean demands for reparations continued with increasing intensity. In 2021 Jamaica launched a petition for reparations following a private motion brought forward by Labor Party MP Mike Henry, who claimed the British government owes 7,6 billion pounds to Jamaica for paying roughly the equivalent of the same sum to slaveholders at the time.<sup>148</sup> The petition was handed over to the Queen, and it, and the motion, were unsuccessful.

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<sup>147</sup> Petitions – UK Government and Parliament, "Pay Slavery Reparations to all Caribbean & African Descendants", <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/325237>

<sup>148</sup> National African-American Reparations Commission, "Jamaica seeks billions of pounds from U.K. over slavery reparations", 15th July 2021, <https://reparationscomm.org/reparations-news/jamaica-seeks-billions-of-pounds-from-u-k-over-slavery-reparations/>

Also in 2021, Barbados – another CARICOM member state – became the first nation in nearly three decades to remove Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state,<sup>149</sup> and in 2022 their PM Mia Mottley made the case that only reparations could fix the psychological, economic and social inequalities that still exist in Caribbean countries.

When Prince William visited Jamaica in March of the same year, protests also broke out, urging the royals to “sey yuh sorry” and demanding reparations. The demonstrators listed 60 reasons for reparations, one for every year of Jamaica’s independence.<sup>150</sup> However, Prince William reiterated Cameron’s previous approach – namely feeling a “deep sorrow for the transatlantic slave trade”, recognizing the “strong sense of injustice and the legacy of slavery”, yet also stated that “reparations are not part of the government’s approach”, thereby circumventing the royal family’s own responsibility.<sup>151</sup>

In September 2022, Queen Elizabeth II died, and was succeeded by Prince Charles. This led to several demands for the royal family to apologize. The Voice, a leading Black newspaper in the UK, called for an apology and reparations for slavery amid backlash about Charles guest editing the paper, with readers commenting that “until the Royal Family acknowledge the part they played in the slave trade, take accountability and pay reparations, we don’t need to hear from them in a Black newspaper”.<sup>152</sup> A spokesperson from The Voice commented that the collaboration was agreed upon due to Charles’ work for race equality, but maintained that an apology and reparations “remains a key demand from all institutions that were involved or gained from it”.<sup>153</sup> In April 2023, Charles gave his support to a research project looking into

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<sup>149</sup> Safi, Michael, “Nelson, BLM and new voices: why Barbados is ditching the Queen”, *The Guardian*, 29th November 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/29/nelson-blm-and-new-voices-how-barbados-came-to-cut-ties-to-crown>

<sup>150</sup> Chappell, Kate and Brian Ellsworth, “British royals’ Jamaica visit stirs demands for slavery reparations”, *Reuters*, 23rd March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/jamaicans-protest-slavery-reparations-ahead-visit-by-british-royals-2022-03-22/>

<sup>151</sup> Mohammed, Keneth, “Sorrow and regret are not enough. Britain must finally pay reparations for slavery”. *The Guardian*, 29th March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/29/sorrow-and-regret-are-not-enough-britain-must-finally-pay-reparations-for-slavery>

<sup>152</sup> White, Nadine, “The Voice calls for royals to apologize for slavery after Prince Charles editorship backlash”, *Independent*, 6th September 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prince-charles-royal-slavery-the-voice-b2159697.html>

<sup>153</sup> White, Nadine, “The Voice calls for royals to apologize for slavery after Prince Charles editorship backlash”, *Independent*



the monarchy's past and ties to slavery. However, during a visit to Rwanda in June, he still expressed "sorrow over the past" rather than apologizing.<sup>154</sup>

Although the royal family did not apologize, other institutions did. In 2022 two larger British cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, apologized for their ties to slavery following reports and consultations commissioned in 2019 and 2020. Measures to repair were also made: Glasgow hired a museum curator and made several museum exhibitions about slavery and made a commitment to spend £1 million a year for 20 years to build a slavery study center. A debate about further approaches such as renaming streets or returning art to their country of origin was also to be held after the next city council was elected.<sup>155</sup> Edinburgh followed a similar path, by apologizing and accepting recommendations and an action plan created by the Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review, which includes points like a "city-wide observance of the annual, UNESCO-designated International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition", developing learning materials to teach about "Scotland and Edinburgh's role in slavery and colonialism", commissioning a "significant public artwork" acknowledging Edinburgh's ties to slavery and colonialism, and changing street names.<sup>156</sup>

They were not the only ones. The University of Cambridge followed Glasgow University's example from three years back after the report of its ties to slavery was completed. While they did not apologize, the university acknowledged its past – and used it to look towards the future. A Cambridge Legacies of Enslavement Fund was created and given £1,5 million as seed funding to be "put towards the research, community engagement and partnership activities proposed in the report", such as increasing the amount of scholarships for Black British, African and Caribbean students, trying to recruit more Black staff, and funding

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<sup>154</sup> Friel and Grindell. "If there's one thing Charles should do as king, it's what his mother never did – apologize for the monarchy's racist past". *Business Insider*

<sup>155</sup> Glasgow – Glasgow City Council, "Glasgow's Slavery Legacy", Updated 27th November 2023, <https://glasgow.gov.uk/article/6530/Glasgow-s-Slavery-Legacy>

<sup>156</sup> Edinburgh – The City of Edinburgh Council, "Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review Report and Recommendations", 30th August 2022, <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/documents/s48188/Item%207.11%20-%20Edinburgh%20Slavery%20and%20Colonialism%20Legacy%20Review%20Report%20and%20Recommendations.pdf> and Edinburgh – The City of Edinburgh Council, "Edinburgh apologises for the city's past role in sustaining slavery and colonialism". 27th October 2022, <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/13578/edinburgh-apologises-for-the-city-s-past-role-in-sustaining-slavery-and-colonialism>

research partnerships in West Africa and the Caribbean, as well as naming streets and public spaces after Black Cambridge graduates and notable abolitionists.<sup>157</sup>

The most notable reparations came from the Church of England. After apologizing in 2006 and reiterating the apology in 2020, a report investigating the Church's ties to slavery was commissioned – and found that funding and numerous benefactions came from individuals linked to or profiting from slavery.<sup>158</sup> In January 2023 the report was finally released, and the Church Commissioners' Board “committed itself to trying to address some of the past wrongs by investing in a better future”, done by pledging £100 million to “a programme of investment, research and engagement”.<sup>159</sup> The majority of the money was used to create a new “impact investment” fund specifically aimed at communities affected by historic slavery, but other initiatives were supporting further research, creating museum exhibitions, and attempting to be a “responsible investor” to combat modern slavery. Furthermore, the Church again stated it was “deeply sorry”, and that chattel slavery “was, and continues to be, a shameful and horrific sin”.<sup>160</sup>

An interesting and new development happened in February 2023, when former BBC journalist Laura Trevelyan went to Grenada and formally apologized to the islanders on behalf of her family, which had owned at least a thousand enslaved people on the island, and set up a £100 000 education fund drawn from her own savings.<sup>161</sup> This makes her the only single individual in the UK who has formally apologized for slavery.

Trevelyan and other British families have also formed a group called Heirs of Slavery, with the intention of exerting more pressure on the government and lobbying for an

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<sup>157</sup> University of Cambridge, «Cambridge responds to legacies of enslavement inquiry», 22nd September 2022, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/legacies-of-enslavement-inquiry>

<sup>158</sup> The Church of England, “Church Commissioners’ research identifies historic links to transatlantic chattel slavery”, 16th June 2022, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/church-commissioners-research-identifies-historic-links-transatlantic>

<sup>159</sup> The Church of England, “Church Commissioners publishes full report into historic links to transatlantic chattel slavery and announces new funding commitment of £100m in response to findings”, 10th January 2023, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-commissioners-publishes-full-report-historic-links-transatlantic>

<sup>160</sup> The Church of England, “Church Commissioners publishes full report into historic links to transatlantic chattel slavery and announces new funding commitment of £100m in response to findings”

<sup>161</sup> Badshah, Nadeem, “Laura Trevelyan urges King Charles to apologise for historical links to slave trade”, *The Guardian*, 15th April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/15/laura-trevelyan-urges-king-charles-to-apologise-for-historical-links-to-slave-trade>

acknowledgement and atonement for the slave trade.<sup>162</sup> However, newly elected PM Rishi Sunak – when challenged by Labour MP Bell Ribeiro-Addy, spurred by the group – refused to apologize, and rather commented that current issues should be prioritized and “trying to unpick our history is not the right way forward”.<sup>163</sup> The month before, two Labour MPs had also called for Sunak’s government to enter “meaningful negotiations” with former Caribbean colonies and pay them reparations.<sup>164</sup> The government thus continues the line set a decade earlier.

## Discussion of key themes – what trends can be seen?

As can be seen on the timeline, much has happened in the course of those last 25 years, and multiple things have changed. Due to the large amount of material, some tentative trends can be drawn, and this thesis will try to account for the major ones, as well as discuss why they might have changed over time.

I argue that there are three general trends which can be seen in the timeline above. These three are:

- 1) A geographical shift of demands for apologies going from Africa to the Caribbean and Britain, matching a shift going from countries slaves were taken from to slave descendants
- 2) A shift in who is thought responsible and should apologize, going from the government only to other institutions and even private individuals, with a matching shift of which entities do apologize
- 3) An increase in reparations in addition to apologies

In addition to those, there is:

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<sup>162</sup> , Badshah, Nadeem, “Laura Trevelyan urges King Charles to apologise for historical links to slave trade”, *The Guardian* and Gentleman, Amelia, “Descendants of UK slave owners call on government to apologize”, *The Guardian*, 24th April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/24/descendants-of-uk-slave-owners-call-on-government-to-apologise>

<sup>163</sup> Adu, Aletha, “Rishi Sunak refuses to apologize for UK slave trade or to pledge reparations”, *The Guardian*, 26th April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/26/rishi-sunak-refuses-to-apologise-for-uk-slave-trade-or-to-pledge-reparations>

<sup>164</sup> Adu, Aletha, “Rishi Sunak refuses to apologize for UK slave trade or to pledge reparations”. *The Guardian*

- 4) A change in how the British public is concerned with apologies, which is especially noticeable in the social media campaigns and protests

However, it is less easy to see if these campaigns were a part of a trend of growing public pressure or a one-off event. This is made even more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which both made protesting difficult to impossible and caused new and more pressing issues to worry about.<sup>165</sup> While there is more public attention about the issue of apologizing and reparations today as reports commissioned during that time are finished, it is still an open question just how much of an impact the demonstrations had, as well as how the public opinion will change about the topic in the future. Although this issue will be discussed to some extent when it is relevant to the first three trends, it will therefore not be examined further on its own.

### Trend 1: A geographical and social shift in who demands apologies

The first trend concerns itself with where the demands for apologies are coming from geographically. Around the turn of the century, African nations were at the forefront of this, had had conferences about the issue, and managed to make it a major topic of a UN conference. After the conference was over, African demands died out. This does not mean Africa was not mentioned or unimportant afterwards: Blair's 2007 aid packet went to Africa, he also restated his "sorrow" when meeting the president of Ghana around the same time,<sup>166</sup> and the British Stop the Maangamizi Campaign is Africa-oriented. However, the debate moved largely to other places after 2001. This might be due to the Durban conference's conclusions. While the final declaration was considered unsatisfactory by many, it was still the result of a political debate about the issue, and might have stopped any further demands. The fact that there were African slave traders might have further complicate the issue.

These other places where the debate continued were largely two areas: Caribbean nations and CARICOM especially, as well as organizations and individuals back in Britain. This is not to say the topic had not been an issue in Britain before; Liverpool's 1999 apology for its ties to the slave trade tells otherwise. Nor does it say that slavery and its legacy was always debated, as the long silences before and after 2006-2007 testify. However, there is still a gradual uptick

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<sup>165</sup> Burns, "Black Lives Matter: reconsidering systemic racism", 321

<sup>166</sup> Anti-Slavery, "Tony Blair apologizes for Britain's role in the Slave Trade"

in interest about it, which can be seen clearly from 2015 onwards when Rhodes Must Fall became popular, and even more so in 2020 and afterwards.

This uptick in interest and protest also matches a shift in who demands the apologies. Where previously political apologies for the slave trade were mostly a matter between states or even groups of states, as well as certain individual politicians and smaller groups of activists, Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter both concerned large groups of individual citizens. Especially the larger Black Lives Matter protests created a “bottom-up” public pressure not seen before. This can also be seen as a result of the issue becoming popular on social media. Both #RhodesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter/#BLM were popular hashtags at the time and debated vigorously on various social media platforms, meaning many people who otherwise would not have engaged themselves became aware of the campaigns. While apologies for slavery were not BLM’s main focus or goal, the fact the movement spurred several can still be seen as a victory for social media activism.

This is not to say that states do no longer demand apologies. CARICOM is a group of 15 Caribbean states, and is one of the most vocal demanders after their 10-point action plan was unveiled in 2014. However, their demands are of a different nature than the African states. Although some issues are similar – both struggle with economical aftereffects both of the slave trade and later colonialism – there is still a difference in the cause. Africa lost people, while the Caribbean nations in large parts consist of slave descendants. Their experiences of the trade are therefore vastly different, just like the cultural, political, and economic impacts are.

In hindsight, the largest consequence and change was the demands moving home to Britain and reaching a larger part of the population. This makes sense, as it turns a previously international issue into a national one. Instead of coming from foreign heads of state, the demands now come from British voters and consumers, and they thus have a different economic and political power behind them. The popularity of the campaigns, especially Black Lives Matter, also enhances this. Smaller groups making demands are nothing new, but the large protests were, and they made a much larger political impact.

Overall, there are many different reasons for this shift. A large part of it can be explained by a clash between narratives, where a newer one highlighting the negative impacts of colonialism

and the British Empire has been gaining ground over the last two decades – with the result that there is a push towards rectifying the issues caused, causing “politics of regret”.<sup>167</sup> An increase in focus on other issues such as systemic racism and the protests spurred by it, in this case Black Lives Matter, can also create national debate. Furthermore, changes in political leaders can also be important, with some being more inclined to push for or against apologies and reparations. Likewise, political events can play a role – considering the lack of demands from African nations after the Durban conference, it can be argued that its conclusion set an end to the debate. However, this is tentative and deserves more research.

### Trend 2: A shift in who is thought to be responsible, should apologize, and apologizes

Connected to the change in who demands the apologies and reparations is a shift in who is thought to be responsible for the slave trade and should apologize. This is especially connected to the change from a purely governmental matter to a more generally domestic one, and can be seen clearly during the larger protests.<sup>168</sup> During this shift, there is a change in focus: company, university, bank, and city ties to the slave trade become more important and are addressed in various ways, ranging from protesters toppling statues to institutions spending vast sums of money as a way of offering repairs. This can be connected to the conflict between different narratives, and how the one pushed by the social media campaigns is gaining ground.

In the timeline this can be seen as a switch from apologies being a government-only matter to involving a variety of universities, banks, a private company, and even single individuals, with a noticeable break occurring in 2015. Before this, discussions about apologies were a government issue, be it between different governments such as during the Durban conference, in motions debated in parliament, at a more local level with cities apologizing, or finally in the Prime Minister’s statement of sorrow in 2006/2007. This is not unreasonable: the government represents the nation in a way institutions or companies do not, and it is also the entity which makes laws and thus has the ultimate responsibility for the slave trade having been both allowed and encouraged.

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<sup>167</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 12 and Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*, 122

<sup>168</sup> Casalicchio, Emilio, “How a slave trade statue highlights divided Britain”, Politico

Only one institution apologized before the large social media campaigns made it a popular issue. This one institution was the Church of England, which is an outlier given it is a religious organization and can be argued to therefore be more concerned with responsibility, morals and acting on what is perceived to be good. This is also evident from their rhetoric, using terms like “guilt”, “sinfulness”, and “repentance”.<sup>169</sup>

The social media campaigns changed the idea of responsibility, highlighting how other institutions have ties to the trade as well. Rhodes Must Fall was a university-specific campaign, and concerned itself – among other things – with the past benefactors of universities and the way they were represented. Black Lives Matter was even more focused on society at large, and it was also as a result of this campaign that most of the apologies were given. Considering it is impossible to deny the trade and often an institution’s ties to it, denying responsibility is often also difficult, and not addressing the demands from the protesters might be seen as damaging to public relations. Especially for companies and institutions, accepting responsibility and making amends or vowing to improve oneself might make for a positive reaction from the public.<sup>170</sup>

Again, this change can be connected to conflict between different narratives, as well as long-standing sentiments and unaddressed problems of which slavery was merely a part. As the new narratives took form and clashed more intensely with the old, the debate about the issues became more prominent within Britain itself – and, as a result, it also started to encompass more entities than just the government. In this case, this is reflected as a change in the idea of who is supposed to apologize and pay amends.

Who the apologies are demanded from and who apologizes are, however, two very different things. The government has received by far the most demands, yet has arguably not apologized, releasing only “statements of sorrow” and later on having an official policy of “moving on”, explicitly without paying reparations. They have thus not responded to the protests, and neither are they forced to the way companies and other institutions are. People can drink in other pubs, choose a different university or use a different bank, but they cannot easily switch to a different government. While many of the protesters will vote, none of the political parties are campaigning for apologizing, and thus the government does not need to

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<sup>169</sup> The Church of England, “The Church and the legacy of slavery”

<sup>170</sup> Xia, “Effects of Companies’ Responses to Consumer Criticism in Social Media,” 75

appease them – and, in addition, it is not the only political issue which voters might be concerned about. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic issues such as inflation, economic issues, and healthcare were of major concern.<sup>171</sup> Companies and institutions of various kinds might be more easily swayed, however. Considering they are more dependent on public goodwill, they might be inclined to react (faster).<sup>172</sup>

In addition, research and a feeling of responsibility can make institutions apologize and offer reparations. In some cases, outside research might have put pressure on the institutions to apologize, such as the University College London “Legacies of British Slavery” database of firms with ties to former slave owners and traders.<sup>173</sup> The most evident example, however, are the many apologies following commissioned reports about the various institutions’ ties to the trade, where the demonstrations spurred the research and the conclusions influence how the institution reacts.

Another kind of responsibility can be argued to be on moral grounds. Considering the nature of the institution and the language used, the Church of England’s apology and reparations can at the very least partly be caused by moral concerns. Something similar can be argued applies to Laura Trevelyan and the rest of the Heirs of Slavery, who want to “face up to” the “wrongs” that their ancestors did.<sup>174</sup>

Finally, institutions might want to appear more politically progressive and use apologies to better their public relations.<sup>175</sup> For certain institutions whose reputation or brand depends on being progressive, offering an apology is also a way to uphold this status. In addition, the vulnerability caused by admitting past ties to the slave trade and taking responsibility might be a way of building trust and a deeper and more lasting relationship with possible users/customers.<sup>176</sup> This also requires some kind of repairs or promises to behave differently in the future to work.<sup>177</sup> What those repairs or promises are varies between the different institutions, however, ranging from anti-racism plans and “everyday inclusion” – which

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<sup>171</sup> Statista, “Which of the following do you think are the most important issues facing the country at this time? (June 2019 to May 2024)”, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/886366/issues-facing-britain/>

<sup>172</sup> Koehn, “Why Saying ‘I’m Sorry’ Isn’t Good Enough,” 242

<sup>173</sup> Ziady “British companies apologize for ties to slavery”, *CNN Business*

<sup>174</sup> Heirs of Slavery. “Home” <https://www.heirsofslavery.org/home>

<sup>175</sup> Xia, “Effects of Companies’ Responses to Consumer Criticism in Social Media,” 75

<sup>176</sup> Xia, “Effects of Companies’ Responses to Consumer Criticism in Social Media,” 76

<sup>177</sup> Koehn, “Why Saying ‘I’m Sorry’ Isn’t Good Enough,” 241



arguably can be more connected to #BLM as a wider movement – to commissioning art, and from scholarships to several millions of pounds in investments in areas affected by historic slavery.

Here, the impact of the different narratives can clearly be seen. The British government has been Conservative since 2010, and their line of “moving on” and not paying reparations matches with the narrative of a glorious British Empire – which was used during the Brexit campaign.<sup>178</sup> Meanwhile, ties to the trade became more important, to the point where certain institutions and companies started to investigate them, commission reports about them, and apologize for them. Whether this was done due to public pressure, wanting to appeal to the public or due to their own initiative, it still shows there is a noticeable change in how parts of the public perceive those ties.

### Trend 3: An increase in reparations

In addition to the changes in where the demands come from and who they are aimed at, there has also been an increase in the focus on, as well as actually giving, reparations rather than just offering an apology. Vows to improve the company/institution and do better in the future have been increasing as well, especially in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In this context, I have divided the options institutions take into three categories, in order to better discuss and pinpoint various trends:

- 1) They do not offer reparations at all
- 2) They might offer boons which can be seen in context with their apology, yet are not stated explicitly to be reparations
- 3) They might explicitly state they are offering reparations, or use other rhetoric explicitly connecting their current actions to their past

Using these categories and the timeline, I have made a chart of the various apologies given, as well as their relation to reparations. This allows for an easier overview of who has done what, when. It also makes it easier to compare the possible reparations, seeing exactly what is addressed where.

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<sup>178</sup> Koegler, Malreddy and Tronicke, “The colonial remains of Brexit,” 586

The categorization is not entirely clear in all cases. The Durban conference, for example, did not only not offer reparations (which makes it fall into category 1), but there were explicit discussions on how compensation could be avoided. There are also times when actions are made explicitly because of a past legacy, but the word “reparation” is not explicitly mentioned. Instead, the institutions take “steps to address a problematic legacy” or are “trying to address past wrongs”. I have placed those into category 3, as I consider the rhetoric used to be such that they can be considered a kind of restitution.

<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Is there an apology?</b>	<b>Possible reparations</b>	<b>Cat.</b>
1999	Liverpool	City	Explicit apology	None	1
2001	Durban conference	UN	Statement of sorrow	Explicitly made sure there was no legal way of claiming compensation	1
2006	Church of England	Inst.	Explicit apology	None, were not endorsed	1
2006/7	PM Blair	Gov.	Statement of sorrow	Announced increased aid to Africa, notes how government is invested in fighting inequality	2
2007	London	City	Explicit apology	None	1
2015	PM Cameron	Gov.	“Move on”	Explicitly against reparations, ~£480 million in infrastructure support	1
2017	All Souls College, Oxford	Inst.	None	“Steps to address problematic legacy”, plaque, scholarships for Caribbean students + £100 000 grant	3
2019	Glasgow University	Inst.	Explicit apology	Explicit reparations. £20 million in research grants and gifts, funding research center	3
2020	Greene King	Com.	Explicit apology	Nothing explicit. Created racism plan and strives for “Everyday Inclusion”	2

2020	Lloyd's of London	Inst.	Explicit apology	Nothing explicit. Partnering with charities, development program for ethnic minorities, presenting own history	2
2020	Bank of England	Inst.	Explicit apology	Nothing explicit. Taking down images, improving inclusivity, exhibition of "Slavery & the Bank"	2
2020	Church of England	Inst.	Restated previous apology	None	1
2022	Glasgow	City	Explicit apology	"Reparative justice strategy". Museum exhibitions, £20 million for building a slavery study center, possible renaming of streets	3
2022	Edinburgh	City	Explicit apology	City-wide observance of Slavery Remembrance Day, developing learning materials, commissioning artwork, changing street names	2
2022	University of Cambridge	Inst.	"Acknowledged its past"	A Legacies of Enslavement Fund of £1,5 million created, scholarships, funding research partnerships, renaming streets and public places, more Black staff	3
2023	Church of England	Inst.	Restated previous apology	"Trying to address some of the past wrongs", "repentance". £100 million fund primarily to invest in communities affected by historic slavery, but also to create museum exhibitions, and combat modern slavery	3

2023	Laura Trevelyan	Ind.	Explicit apology	Explicit reparations. £100 000 education fund	3
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The most important trend which can be seen is the decline of events in category 1 and the vast increase of category 3, showcasing how some kind of amending – be it explicit or not – has become the norm when apologies are given. This does not mean that it is the norm overall, however: many entities have not apologized nor offered any kinds of reparations, and the government has explicitly stated that “reparations are not part of the Government’s approach”.<sup>179</sup>

This change in attitude towards reparations happened at a very specific point in time, which matches with when a larger part of the British public started to protest and participate in social media campaigns highlighting the issue. In this context, pressure from the public can compel institutions and companies to not only apologize for perceived past mistakes, but also to amend them.<sup>180</sup> Not offering anything at all might therefore not be seen as acceptable or enough – which translates into all apologies or events falling under category 2 and 3 from this point onwards. The change of the Church of England’s stance to reparations over time serves as a good example embodying this trend, with the Church being the only institution to comment on the issue three times over the course of 15 years. In 2006, reparations were discussed alongside apologizing, and were voted down. In 2020, when the Church restated their apology, they were still negative to reparations. However, once the 2023 report was finished, they set up a £100 million fund as “repentance” and in an attempt to “address some of the past wrongs”. While not using the word “reparations” outright, the rhetoric is similar, and the change is still noticeable.

In this context it is also important to see exactly what is being done, and whether the “amends” are truly connected to the slave trade or not. In some category 2 events they clearly are: Edinburgh’s city-wide observance of Slavery Remembrance Day, learning materials and changed street names are undeniably connected to the trade, and Bank of England’s exhibition about their past and taking down images of former slave-owners are likewise connected to the institution’s past. In other cases, it is much less clear. Although Greene King’s apology was

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<sup>179</sup> Petitions – UK Government and Parliament, “Pay Slavery Reparations to all Caribbean & African Descendants”

<sup>180</sup> Koehn, “Why Saying ‘I’m Sorry’ Isn’t Good Enough,” 240

explicitly about slavery, their “Everyday Inclusion” and racism plan are aimed towards combatting present discrimination inside the company and cannot be seen as reparations for historical harms at all. Instead, they might answer to other demands by the same social media movement, in this case Black Lives Matter.

The ones offering category 2 amends have, however, not gone as far as to outright call the actions they are taking reparations, nor use other similar language. This might be to avoid any legal liabilities, as offering reparations might be seen as taking responsibility which in turn might give way to more demands for compensation. The clearest example here is the Durban conference: although it is a category 1 event, there was a large debate about exactly what could and could not lead to legal consequences further down the road, and how to avoid it.<sup>181</sup>

When it comes to category 2 and 3, there is also a division between what amends are given. Roughly, they fall into two categories: the amendments done “at home” in Britain, and the ones done in other countries. Usually, the former consists of funding for education, showcasing history, changing street names and commissioning artwork, while the latter consists of monetary grants of some kind such as investments or funding of infrastructure and research and scholarships. This division matches the demands from Britain and from Africa/the Caribbean: Caricom has mentioned a knowledge program, establishment of cultural institutions, a development program and financial support in their 10-point action plan, which matches the various reparations closely.<sup>182</sup> The social media movements, on their side, push a new narrative and demand a different way of thinking about the past, which some institutions are trying to accommodate. Commissioning new artworks, removing old ones, creating new learning materials for schools and renaming streets are examples of the new narrative gaining ground, as it marks a change in culture and a change in the stories told about the past.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Collste, *Global Rectificatory Justice*, 93

<sup>182</sup> CARICOM. «CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice»

<sup>183</sup> Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*, 11

## Conclusion

In the last 25 years, much has changed in the way the British think about the issue of apologizing for the slave trade. The context surrounding the debate has changed considerably, from it being an issue not frequently mentioned and primarily discussed between governments to it being “taken home” to Britain and turning into a national debate spurred by social media campaigns. The latter had two results: it cast a wider net over who was thought to be responsible and who should apologize for connections to the slave trade, and it caused several entities to apologize and occasionally also offer reparations, which marked a dramatic change in how the issue is handled. This is not to say that everyone apologized, nor that there was no conflict, but there are signs the narrative promoted by the campaigns is winning ground.

The British government’s response has, however, been more or less constant. With the exceptions of Blair’s 2006/2007 “statement of sorrow”, the official line has been to avoid doing anything which might cause legal responsibility, either by actively fighting it or stating it is time to “move on”. However, the demands have changed, and especially who is demanding apologies and reparations. Where African countries were making demands 25 years ago, it is now the Caribbean countries and parts of the British public who are the most vocal, with the most recent development being prominent British families and persons creating a group explicitly to lobby for this cause.

The debate surrounding the slave trade, its legacy and eventual responses to that is still ongoing, however. Much has also happened in recent time, and the trends outlined here are in no way concluded. However, they might offer a tentative groundwork for more research to be made later on.

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## Appendix: Relevance for the teaching profession

The thesis does include several themes which are relevant to the teaching profession. The topic itself is part of the curriculum: although a complete history of apologies is not mentioned, there are explicit teaching goals where a history of the slave trade and reactions to it are relevant, for example (my translation) “discover and reflect about diversity and social conditions in the English-speaking world, based on historical contexts”.<sup>184</sup>

More topics which are mentioned are the current political situation and how it changes, as well as how narratives about the past are an important part of legitimizing the viewpoints. This can be discussed in English class, especially in upper secondary, but how the past connects to the present is an important topic overall and can equally well be moved to other classes such as history and social sciences. It can also be connected to the interdisciplinary theme “Democracy and Citizenship”, as the various narratives and the conflict between them is an important part of political and cultural debates, and understanding them is thus helpful to comprehend how a democratic society works. In this context the slave trade and the debate surrounding it can serve as a good example as well, especially the protests of more recent years and the impact they have had.

The debate can also be used to discuss ethics. Point 1.3 in the overarching curriculum (Overordnet del) is “Critical Thinking and Ethical Consciousness”,<sup>185</sup> and discussing the different narratives and pros and cons of apologizing can be an interesting and relevant way to connect this to either English or history lessons.

In addition to using the topic itself in lessons, the thesis has also been useful as a larger project to plan and then execute. Considering the size of the project it needed a good disposition, a solid amount of secondary literature, several different kinds of primary literature, analysis, and discussion. All of these things frequently occur in a school setting, and having done a larger project like this is helpful to be able to give pupils better tasks, offer better help and guidance, and to be able to give them better feedback on their work. In

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<sup>184</sup> UDIR. 2019. «Kompetansemål etter Vg1 studieforbereidende utdanningsprogram». Updated 13th April 2023, accessed 15th May 2024. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/kompetansemal-og-vurdering/kv6?lang=nob>

<sup>185</sup> UDIR. 2019. “Kritisk tenkning og etisk bevissthet”. Updated 7th November 2019, accessed 15th May 2024. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/opplaringens-verdigrunnlag/1.3-kritisk-tenkning-og-etisk-bevissthet/?kode=eng01-04&lang=nob>

addition to this, such a long work requires a certain amount of persistence and patience, and having written a thesis like this is thus useful in a work context in general.





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