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# **Representation of 'Ghana' in John Dramani Mahama's *My First Coup D'etat: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa***

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**Abstract:** This article examines the representation of Ghana as a nation in John Dramani Mahama's autobiography, *My First Coup d'état: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa*. Drawing on a sociological approach to literary criticism and informed by postcolonial and social constructivist perspectives, the article reads the text as a national narrative in which personal memory intersects with collective history. The analysis demonstrates that beyond recounting the lives of Mahama and his father, E. A. Mahama, the autobiography reconstructs Ghana's political, social, cultural and geographical history from the precolonial period through colonialism, military rule and the contemporary democratic era. By foregrounding how national identity is narratively produced through representations of power, culture and space, the article argues that *My First Coup d'état* functions as a public archive of Ghanaian nationhood rather than merely a personal memoir. The article, thus, contributes to African Studies by expanding critical approaches to political autobiography as a significant site of postcolonial national narration.

**Keywords:** Autobiography, political life writing, national identity, postcolonial memory, Ghana

## Introduction

Autobiographical writing by African political leaders occupies a complex space between personal memory, national history and ideological self-fashioning. In postcolonial African contexts, such narratives often function not merely as life stories, but as cultural and historical archives through which the nation is remembered, interpreted and, in some cases, reimagined. Yet, within African literary and cultural studies, political autobiographies by post-independence leaders are frequently approached primarily as historical documents or political commentaries, rather than as literary texts that actively construct national meaning.

This article intervenes in that critical gap by examining *My First Coup d'état: Memories from the Lost Decades of Africa* (2012), the autobiography of Ghana's fourth president of the Fourth Republic, H. E. John Dramani Mahama. Rather than treating the text solely as a record of leadership experience, the article reads it as a sociological and cultural narrative that represents Ghana as a multifaceted entity, encompassing its political, socio-cultural and geographical dimensions across various historical periods. The article argues that Mahama's autobiography functions as a national narrative that goes beyond personal recollection to reconstruct Ghana's political history, cultural practices and spatial identity from the precolonial era through colonialism, military rule and democratic consolidation.

*My First Coup d'état* unfolds across three interconnected narrative strands: the life of the author, the life of his father, E. A. Mahama and the historical development of the Ghanaian nation. While the personal histories of father and son frame the narrative, the text's most expansive dimension is its sustained engagement with Ghana's socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical evolution from precolonial times to the present. It is this national dimension of the autobiography that constitutes the primary focus of this study. The analysis is guided by the following questions: How does *My First Coup d'état* represent Ghana's political history across different historical phases? In what ways does the narrative encode socio-cultural values, traditions and belief systems as constitutive elements of national identity? And how does geographical description function as a mode of representing belonging, memory and heritage in the text?

This article is grounded in a postcolonial and social constructivist theoretical framework, which understands national identity, history and culture as socially produced through discourse and narrative rather than as fixed or essential categories. From a postcolonial

perspective, *My First Coup d'état* is read as a text shaped by the historical legacies of colonialism, military rule and democratic transition, while social constructivism provides a lens for examining how Ghanaian identity is constructed through representations of politics, culture and space. Autobiography, in this context, functions as a narrative site where personal memory intersects with collective history, allowing the author to participate in the construction of national meaning. This framework enables the study to analyse Mahama's narrative not merely as personal testimony, but as a discursive process through which Ghana's postcolonial identity is articulated and contested.

Methodologically, the article employs the sociological approach to literary criticism, examining the relationship between the narrative and the society it represents. Through close textual analysis, the article demonstrates that Mahama's autobiography serves as a composite narrative of Ghanaian nationhood, offering insights into the intersections of politics, culture, geography and memory in postcolonial African life writing. This article does not seek to reconstruct Mahama's life through private archival materials such as letters or diaries, but rather to examine *My First Coup d'état* as a public autobiographical text through which national history and identity are narrated. The analysis, therefore, focuses on representation, narrative strategy and sociocultural meaning rather than biographical verification.

### **Representing Ghana's political history: power, coups and constitutional transitions**

A more significant part of *MFCD* is about the political history of Ghana. The narrative captures the genesis of political activism in the old Ghana empire through British imperialism to the current democratic era. Rex Gibson (1998) explains that "political perspectives of human life are rooted in politics and power". In effect, political literary criticism focuses on the treatment of power and its distribution within a story and what can be extracted from politics in a story through what it reveals about the society it explores. This section of the work examines aspects of Ghanaian politics in *MFCD*. A close reading of *MFCD* reveals five distinct phases of the Ghanaian political landscape. This article identifies these as the era of the founders, imperialism, nationalism, independence, coup d'états and military rule and finally, the Return to Constitutionalism. The founders' era captures Ghana's political history in the pre-colonial era. In *MFCD*, the narrator traces that period to the reign of Askia Dawud, leader and founder of the Gonja state in the 1500s. He explains that modern Ghana emerged from the old Songhai



Empire, which at its peak stretched through the territories of Mali, Niger, Senegal, Guinea, the Gambia and Burkina Faso. The Gonja rulers, we read, had Muslim spiritualists who interceded on their behalf during wars. When the independent state of Ghana was founded, these Islamic clerics and spiritualists continued to stay in the territory and formed a part of the religious dimension in modern-day Ghana (88-91). The reference to Askia Dawud and the Gonja state shows a cultural continuity between pre-colonial Ghana and modern Ghana, and this article will argue that powerful empires like the Songhai still influence contemporary identity. The role of Islamic spiritualists in the leadership of the Gonja state shows the deep connection between religion and governance, which continued until modern Ghana (Silverman and Owusu-Ansah 1989). Even after independence, Islamic clerics remained an integral part of the religious landscape of Ghana, showing that colonialism did not erase pre-colonial traditions but rather made them coexist and shape the political and cultural systems of the nation (Sarbah 2023). This persistence is consistent with Ghana's pluralistic religious environment, where Islam and Christianity are key in shaping social norms and politics. It also offers insights into the continuing processes of identity and social integration in a multicultural postcolonial society where ethnic and religious groups contest for recognition in the national narrative. Moreover, the focus on precolonial history and personalities such as Askia Dawud may be an attempt to reclaim African cultural heritage and, in the process, challenge colonial education systems that erased Indigenous histories in the formation of Ghana's identity.

Modern Ghana's ties with Europe have continued to occupy postcolonial literary texts, and *MFCD* is no exception. The narrative succinctly relates the political history of colonial activities that have continued to affect lives in modern-day Ghana. The narrator explains that the British entered the Gold Coast territory in 1845. Along came their police and military force. By 1874, the colonial government had established a regimented police force called the Gold Coast Constabulary (32). When the Gold Coast formally became a colony, a military force called the Gold Coast Regiment was formed. Aside from this, another force emerged called the Native Authority Force, which had the mandate to enforce customary laws in the territory. The colonial government was bent on ensuring law and order in the colonies; in effect, it put in place several measures, including importing military personnel. The depiction of colonial governance in *MFCD* shows the far-reaching impacts of European imperialism on modern Ghanaian society.

The British police and military forces were introduced in the Gold Coast region as the basis of the modern legal and administrative systems of the country. The Gold Coast Constabulary and the Gold Coast Regiment were established to enforce the law and protect the colony, thus indicating the extent to which the colony was to be controlled by force. This impact is felt even to this day. Also, the establishment of the Native Authority Force to implement customary laws reveals the dual governance system that was adopted during the colonial era, that is, the British legal system and Indigenous laws. This colonial heritage is still observable in the present-day Ghanaian legal system, which is based on British common and customary laws. Using military personnel to enforce law and order in the colony shows that governance was militarised, a trend that the country has retained (Sederberg, 1971). The narrative under consideration also investigates the historical basis of many of Ghana's current institutions and further prompts one to consider how colonialism influenced the formation of institutions, power and even the policing of postcolonial societies.

The economic activities of the colonial enterprise are also highlighted. The narrator explains that several European countries moved into the colonies, including the Dutch, who built forts in the mid-1600s to keep and transit slaves (14). The robust nature of the slave trade can be attested to by the number of slave castles built along the coast of Ghana. The number of slave castles along Ghana's coast is estimated to be more than those found in any part of the world (42). Trade-in slaves were one of the many reasons education in the Northern parts of Ghana stalled. Parents were terrified and afraid of sending their children to schools where they would be captured and sent to work at plantation farms overseas (28). The socioeconomic effect of the trade was beyond comprehension, and to this date, the northern parts of Ghana remain some of the poorest regions in the whole country. Again, the Northern region was and still is considered the agricultural hub of the country, and most of the inhabitants in the Northern region are agricultural workers (127-128). Economic exploitation during colonialism, as depicted in *MFCD*, has a focus on the consequences of the European slave trade and its implications for modern Ghana. The narrator stresses the role of European countries like the Dutch in building the forts along the coast to facilitate the slave trade to the Atlantic region. This is because a larger number of slave castles are found in Ghana than in any other part of the world (Osei-Tutu Brempong 2004). This form of trade not only had direct impacts on slavery but also affected the rate of

education. For instance, in the northern regions of Ghana, parents were not willing to send their children to school because of the fear of being captured and sold into slavery. The economic effects of this disruption are still visible to date, and the Northern region is one of the poorest regions in the country. Agricultural work is still the main occupation of many in the population. This background information shows that slavery, education, and economic development are interlinked, thus suggesting that colonial economic exploitation of labor has left an indelible mark on the socioeconomic development of Ghana.

*MFCD* also reveals the structure of colonial political administration. In the narrative, we read that the governors oversaw the daily running of the colonies and reported directly to the Queen of England. Next were the District Commissioners, who answered only to the governor. Beneath the District Commissioners were various chiefs, who had the authority to adjudicate and legislate only in the daily affairs of the colonies. However, the District Commissioner's decisions could overturn the Chief's adjudication, which meant that the Chief's authority was only ceremonial (24). If a chief disagreed with the District Commission, the latter had every right to dethrone the chief (29) permanently. Like most policies introduced by the colonial government, the position of the chief in the colonial administration brought disrepute and disrespect to the local authority. The chiefs then became ceremonial authorities who amounted to nothing because the District Commissioner could permanently overturn any decision by the chief if the latter found it unpalatable. Again, the narrator explains that the colonial administration's territory initially covered only the Southern territories. The Northern regions and the Asante Kingdom were the last to be added to the Gold Coast colony in the 1900s (28). This disparity explains the consideration of the situation of the national capital in Cape Coast and later relocation to the greater Accra region. Revealed in *MFCD* was the disdain of colonial administration towards local authority. Governors were in charge of the colonial administration and reported only to the Queen of England. Local chiefs who were once the chief in governance were made to be ceremonial. They were allowed to exercise power in adjudicating local concerns, but the District Commissioners could easily overrule them and thus reduce them to symbolic leaders. In the extreme, the District Commissioner could even dethrone a chief who disagreed with his power. This thinking aligns with the colonial plan of controlling and subduing precolonial power relations. These factors resulted in the erosion of the power of local leadership and the imposition

of centralisation (Crook 1986). The devaluation of the North and the diction of Indigenous governance mechanisms indicates that colonial rule was characterised by centralisation and regional inequalities.

In *MFCD*, we read that British political dominance of the Gold Coast colony continued until the mid-19th century, when nationalist activities began to take root in the colonies, culminating at the end of the independence struggle on March 6, 1957. Various organizations and individuals spearheaded the independence struggle; however, the activities of one such organisation, the Great Consolidated Peoples Party, GCPP, cannot be discounted. Interestingly, GCPP is elicited in *MFCD*, but it is worth knowing that, except for Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the other five members of the big six were members of the GCPP. As the narrator admits, Kwame Nkrumah opted for an American education at a time when his contemporaries chose British education. He earned his bachelor's degree at Lincoln University and a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania (8). Dr J.B. Danquah invited Dr Nkrumah to assume the position of General Secretary of GCPP. The above indicates the rising political consciousness and nationalist movements on the Gold Coast as the fight for independence intensified, resulting in Ghana's independence in 1957. The part of the Great Consolidated Peoples Party (GCPP) in the nationalist movement reveals the existence of structured political associations that formed a part of the effort to overthrow the colonial rulers.

Again, the fact that Dr Kwame Nkrumah chose to attend an American university instead of following the colonial British educational system shows how politically diverse he was. He had more political vision than the normal leadership of his era, which was British-influenced. This difference in education experiences determined the direction of the independence struggle and leadership of Nkrumah, who was to become an important political and cultural leader of Ghana and other parts of Africa. Also, the invitation of Dr. J.B. Danquah to Nkrumah to assume the position of the General Secretary of GCPP shows that Nkrumah was recognised as one of the rising leaders of the nationalist movement to emerge in Ghana. This contradiction between the British educational system and the attraction of other systems shows the contest between colonial influences and the spirit of liberty through which Ghana attained her independence.

Unfortunately, a policy misunderstanding brought about a rift between Dr Nkrumah on one side and the other five members on the other. As a result, Dr Nkrumah formed his political party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). It was the CPP, headed by Dr

Nkrumah, that won independence for Ghana. The members of the big six, whom the narrator called 'nationalists', were Dr. J.B. Danquah, Dr. Ebenezer Ako Adjei, Mr. Edward Akuffo-Addo, Mr. William Ofori-Atta, Mr. Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lampsey and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. The attribution of Ghana's independence to the members of the Big Six is a unitary approach by the narrator, himself a statesman, political leader, and role model, yet his follow-up comment on Nkrumah's overthrow raises doubts that warrants an explanation of Dr Nkrumah's position in Ghana's politics. The narrator explains that Kwame Nkrumah had a "far-reaching vision for Ghana and Africa" and adds that some people either did not share that vision or did not approve of his methods for making it a reality. As a result, on February 24, 1966, a Coup D'état happened, which toppled the CPP government (9). All Ministers of State, Members of Parliament, District Commissioners, Chairmen, and Secretaries of the CPP government were asked to report to the nearest police station and were all arrested (14). Because the first coup was swift and unexpected, it is often called "a bloodless coup". Ghana's first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, died in exile in 1972 (15). The overthrow of Dr Nkrumah ended the era of nationalism and independence struggle and ushered the country into 12 years of 'coup d'étatism' and military rule.

The military established the National Liberation Council to manage affairs (14; 107). Those found guilty were punished, while those found blameless, like E. A. Mahama, were released after a year in prison (15). Major General Ankrah was made the Head of State. After a while, Gen Ankrah was ousted from power on corruption charges. Then, Brigadier General Afrifa stepped in, and he served briefly; elections were held in 1969, which attempted to bring the country back to constitutional rule; that attempt was partly successful (129). Under constitutional rule, Dr Busia became Prime Minister of the Republic of Ghana. He served for a little over a year. Busia introduced the Aliens Compliance Order, which demanded that all illegal aliens in Ghana, the majority of whom were Nigerians, return to their home countries. Not satisfied with Busia's government, the armed forces and Colonel Acheampong staged another Coup d'état in 1972; at the end, Colonel K Acheampong was made Head of State. He introduced Operation Feed Yourself (130), a policy that urged Ghanaians to cultivate their food. It yielded some results. Colonel Acheampong promoted himself to the rank of General in 1975. General Acheampong was Ghana's fifth Head of State and third military ruler. Revealed in the just narrated is a focus on the turbulent political history of Ghana

in the post-independence era, more so on the series of military coups and the short-lived periods of constitutional rule. The National Liberation Council (NLC), which was the first administration after a coup, clearly illustrates the fluidity in Ghana's politics, where military takeover was used frequently to handle political duties. The coups and changes in leadership, which can be seen through the lives of Major General Ankrah, Brigadier General Afrifa, and Colonel Acheampong, show that Ghana's political systems were weak and ineffective during this period. The fact that General Ankrah was ousted on corruption charges and others who followed him could not hold on to power indicates that it was difficult to consolidate power in a post-colonial state. Dr. Busia's short tenure as Prime Minister and implementation of measures such as the Aliens Compliance Order show that the country attempted to solve national problems. However, all these were unpopular and led to military takeovers. Colonel Acheampong's military administration, which implemented the Operation Feed Yourself policy, demonstrates that the state was prone to using authoritarian measures even though some policies worked. The frequent military administrations and attempts to transfer power to civilians reflect the clash between democratic desires and military might in Ghana's political growth. These events, most notably the political continuity problem and the military's control of politics have influenced the governance of Ghana and its citizens to this date. The continued instability in this era has helped shape Ghana's present-day political culture, the military's role in governance, and the country's transition to civilian rule in the later decades.

General Acheampong formed the National Redemption Council and, in 1974, introduced Operation 'Keep Right,' which switched Ghana's measurement from imperial to metric; he was successful (166). He also introduced the National Reconstruction Programme, which aimed at promoting employment and teaching practical work skills. Later, General Acheampong dissolved his political party and replaced it with the Supreme Military Council (177). After a while, the people became fed up and requested General Acheampong to step down. The economy of Ghana was challenging; the military took over the running of the state and met out brutalities on the citizenry. Hoarding, an indigenous form of corruption called 'kalabule' emerged. In order to appease the growing agitation among the citizenry, General Acheampong introduced the Union Government, a system of government based on an Indigenous form of democracy. Lots of money was spent on teaching the ideals of the Union Government. Universities were forced to close



in the agitations and demonstrations that were ensured. Most Ghanaians, especially University students, were against the union government. The government organised a referendum in March 1978 to determine whether the Union Government was to stay (*MFCD* 187-188). He failed. General Acheampong's political party forced him to resign. Lieutenant General Fred Akuffo took over as Head of State in 1979, but nothing changed. The economy remained mismanaged (*MFCD* 203). General Acheampong's rule is a clear example of the complexity of military governance, economic uncertainty, and population discontent in Ghana's post-independence experience. His policies like Operation 'Keep Right' and the National Reconstruction Program show attempts at improving efficiency through infrastructure modernisation and creating employment but did little to tackle the root economic problems. The shift from the National Redemption Council to the Supreme Military Council reveals how military rulers often reorganised power to keep on top of the situation rather than to exercise governance effectively. The appearance of the term 'kalabule', which means corruption through hoarding and price inflation, shows the level of economic hardship that led to people's anger. The Union Government introduced by Acheampong as a new kind of democracy shows that he was aware of the existing opposition, but the Union Government was rejected in the 1978 referendum, meaning that the population wanted real democratic governance. The closure of the universities because of the protests shows the political activism of students and intellectuals in combating military autocracy. His forced resignation and the subsequent leadership of Lieutenant General Fred Akuffo, who brought about no significant change, also shows the pattern of poor leadership and economic mismanagement that was evident in Ghana's military regimes. The political instability of this period made it a springboard to subsequent efforts to achieve constitutional governance and economic development.

A year later, in 1979, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings staged a coup and set up the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Jerry John Rawlings (1947-2020) introduced the 'house cleaning', by which five former heads of state were executed (*MFCD* 210). By then, the CPP party had been reorganised into a PNP, the People's National Party, led by Dr. Hilla Liman (1934-1998). Elections were held, and Liman was elected president of the Third Republic (*MFCD* 204). The economy was still unstable under Dr Hilla Liman. A little over two years later, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings staged another coup and ousted Liman from power on December 31, 1981 (*MFCD*

211). The 1981 coup marked the end of Coup D'Etat in Ghana, but not the end of military rule. Jerry John Rawlings, a flight lieutenant in the Armed Forces, continued to rule as Head of State of the Republic of Ghana for eleven years until the nation was ushered into constitutional rule in 1992.

The narrator explains that the period after the second coup was marked by constant military brutality and the murder of innocent citizens. The difficulties within the country forced many people to migrate to greener pastures. We read, "[T]he postcolonial experience in nationhood was failing miserably" (*MFCD* 243). Ghanaians started leaving en masse (*MFCD* 244). Many of these emigrated people entered Nigeria, Europe, and North America. Skilled Ghanaian workers were highly sought after in Nigeria, for instance. Later, the Nigerian government introduced the Aliens Compliance Order in which all illegal aliens, the majority of whom were Ghanaians, were given two weeks to leave Nigeria. This policy, the narrator believes, may be a reaction to the 1969 Aliens Compliance Order introduced by the Acheampong government (*MFCD* 261). Life had become tough in Ghana. Nearly all government companies were at a halt. For instance, a journey that takes a few hours could take over twenty-four hours because of the unavailability of transport. (*MFCD* 274) Shortly after, President Rawlings ushered the country into an Economic Recovery Programme with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and Ghana's economy improved. Food was readily available, agricultural output was rising, necessary provisions were available and essential commodities were no longer hoarded (*MFCD* 303). The period after Rawlings' coups demonstrates that the postcolonial state in Ghana was rather unstable and that military interventions always followed democratic transitions. The AFRC's rule was quite brutal, and they executed people, which illustrates how far they went to fight corruption. However, at the same time, it increased the national trauma and caused emigration. The author correctly indicates that 'the postcolonial experience in nationhood was failing miserably' since it captures the economic decline and governance failures that made Ghana a country from which many had to flee. The Nigerian Aliens Compliance Order shows that exclusionary policies may have unforeseen long-term effects. In the end, Rawlings had to switch to economic reforms with the help of the Economic Recovery Program supported by the IMF and the World Bank, apparently realizing that military rule could not bring the country back to its feet.



The above is a comprehensive narrative of the political history of Ghana from pre-colonial through colonial to the present dispensation. From a postcolonial perspective, the narrative reveals how colonial governance, military intervention and democratic transition shaped the distribution of power in Ghana. The detailed military narrative indicates that military intervention was incompatible with economic pragmatism as Ghana moved towards democratic governance in 1992. However, there is an element of skepticism underneath the narrator's tone. This can be inferred from the details of the various coups. Since 1981, the nation has been politically stable after five successful democratically elected regimes. The incessant political upheavals in Ghana speak volumes about the country's ethos. Most African countries experienced this era of rapid political instability, as depicted in *MFCD*.

### **Socio-Cultural Values and National Identity in *My First Coup d'état***

For obvious reasons, the narrator repeatedly demonstrates the importance of formal education to himself and the nation of Ghana. Formal education introduced by the British was, for a long time, limited to the southern territories and later to the middle belt. In the mid-1920s, the colonial government established the Achimota School with assistance from various chiefs. Achimota School has kindergarten, primary and secondary divisions. In 1925, the Prince of Wales paid an official visit to the school and consented to have his name placed on the Achimota School. Achimota School was therefore named The Prince of Wales College in 1925. Besides the Achimota School, the colonial government extended education to all the regions in the colonies.

Though the colonial government made strides in education, the narrator bemoans the discriminatory nature of colonial education. This is attested to by the fact that before the 1900s, the colonial government deliberately withheld formal education from the Northern regions because they believed the people of the North were better suited for "labor than for intellectual endeavors" (*MFCD* 28). This gap accounts for the high illiteracy rates in the three Northern regions. The discriminative nature of colonial education is also reiterated in Stephanie Newell's introduction to *Marita or the Folly of Love*. She notes, "Female literacy levels remained low throughout the colonial period, and women formed a tiny proportion of the small percentage of literate Africans" (18). Colonial education was gender-biased, as Newell points out. Therefore, the education system was the preserve of Southern males in colonial Ghana. Despite its shortcomings, the colonial education system in the Gold Coast was structurally adequate. For instance, when

formal education was extended to the northern regions, pupils from distant places to school were placed in properly equipped boarding houses (*MFCD* 22). A case in point is the Achimota School, where female adults and maternal figures were assigned to each dormitory in primary school. These women cared for the “overall well-being” of the students (*MFCD* 10). When he assumed office as the first president of the Republic of Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah imparted education to a large extent. Besides secondary schools, Dr Nkrumah built two universities: the University of Cape Coast and the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi (*MFCD* 146). Further, to facilitate education and probably bridge the vast gap between Southern and Northern schools, Dr Nkrumah introduced the Northern Scholarship scheme, which catered for tuition, accommodation, and boarding fees for the people of the Northern regions.

Moreover, what has been dubbed Ghanaian hospitality is not left out of the narrative. The people of Ghana are depicted as naturally hospitable and welcoming. This is attested to by the customary offering of water to visitors in every Ghanaian household (*MFCD* 117). The depiction of hospitality in Ghana in the narrative, primarily through the traditional gesture of water offering to the visitors, shows real generosity and communalism, which are the cultural norms. This is an act that seems to be quite simple and, at the same time, is loaded with meaning regarding the way in which Ghanaians view the world: harmony in society and respect for guests. From the historical perspective, full of colonial disturbances and postcolonial struggles, such traditions help keep the region’s cultural identity intact when all the political and economic barriers have failed. In addition, the hospitality that endures challenges the external narratives that cast Ghana’s history as only revolving around instability by illustrating its social fabric’s strength.

Besides the colonial government, Euro-Christian missionaries played a role in developing colonial Ghana. In healthcare, various missionaries established hospitals in colonial Ghana; for example, the Presbyterian mission established the infamous Agogo Hospital, which specialises in eye care. The Agogo Hospital serves not only Ghana but the entire sub-region. In one of such hospitals established by the Catholic Church, the narrator was taken to when he needed medical attention. That hospital was described as neat, with modern beds, clean sheets, and kind-hearted nurses (*MFCD* 70). That is a recognition of missionaries’ contribution to Ghana’s development. Many such hospitals are scattered throughout Ghana.

Again, the nucleus of Ghanaian society as a closely-knit unit is not left out of the narrative. The narrator points out that in most Ghanaian families, new mothers return to their extended families to be cared for until the child is deemed old enough to accompany his or her mother back to her marital home (*MFCD* 26). This brings to the fore the role of the extended family system in Ghana. Notwithstanding this, that system had its disadvantages; in some cases, nursing mothers returned to find their positions as wives usurped by other concubines or would-be wives. Presently, however, members of the extended family, in most cases, the mother of the new mother instead visits, stays for a while until the baby is old, and then returns to her permanent residence. Ghanaian society emphasizes the extended family system in providing communal support and social cohesion. This practice of new mothers going to their families for postpartum care is based on a deeply rooted notion of people's responsibility for childcare not being the responsibility of the nuclear family alone (Kingsley Nyarko 2013). However, the system's vulnerabilities are also acknowledged, especially regarding marital stability; for instance, some women returned to find their positions threatened. The change to a temporary modified version of this practice, where a mother or close relative visits, shows that the social structure is evolving with modernity, urbanisation and changing gender dynamics; it shows the balance between tradition and contemporary realities.

Further highlighted is the essence of customary rites among Ghanaians. Several customs mark every phase of life in Ghana. Instantaneously, mentions could be naming ceremonies, rites of passage, marriage rites, divorce rites, funeral rites, installation rites and many others. One that is given prominence in *MFCD* is the naming rites (*MFCD* 93-96). Every tribe in Ghana has a unique format for performing the naming rites: the Ga-Dangme call it Kpojiemo and the Akans call it Abadinto. The ceremony is an occasion to accept or welcome the newborn baby into society and give the new child an identity. Being a Dagomba, the narrator relates that all newborn babies are considered strangers; baby boys are called Saando and girls are called Saanpaga. The babies are kept indoors for a week, after which they are outdoored and given names, making them official community members. Eight days after the birth of the child, elderly ones, popularly called the 'Wanzam' or itinerant barbers, are called upon to circumcise the baby boy and shave off his hair. The Wanzam are also made to imprint distinguishing tribal marks on the faces of the babies. We further read that all traditional Ghanaian names "hold meaning." There are distinct names for the days a child is born, the ethnic

group the child belongs to, the first or the last in that lineage or even the circumstances of the child's birth. Ghanaian culture emphasises naming rites as can be seen; their prominence stresses the role of identity, community belonging and tradition. The fact that names are assigned differently based on birth circumstances, lineage or ethnic affiliation is evidence of the importance of names as things that are not just labels but historical markers of heritage and personality. More broadly, the belief that newborns are strangers initially and only officially outdoored and named speaks to a broader spiritual and communal understanding of personhood. Furthermore, circumstances like circumcision and the imprinting of tribal marks by elders, like the Wanzam, add to the weight given to customary rites in constructing individual and collective identity. However, some of these practices concerning bodily modifications and seclusion periods may be undergoing a reshaping due to evolving social norms and modernisation, marking a continuing negotiation between tradition and contemporary values.

Moreover, the place of religion is not left out of the narrative. The narrator explains that Ghana is a multireligious state yet mentions Christianity and Islam as the only religions in Ghana. That is quite unfortunate, as Ghana is made up of Christians, Muslims and traditional believers. One of the first religious bodies in Ghana was the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholics routinely practiced what the narrator calls "choreographed rituals" like kneeling, sitting, standing, and singing. Priests wore long robes, while Nuns wore habits and served Holy Communion in an ornate silver goblet. The entire mass was conducted in Latin, a language that, according to the narrator, no one among the congregants understood (MFCD 81-82). Because that mass is conducted in a language none of the congregants, other than the priest, understood speak to the language situation in Ghana. There are nearly 100 languages in Ghana, nine of which are taught in schools, yet English is officially accepted. However, data presented in *The Ghana Film Industry and the Politics of the Ghanaian Language* (Manieson 2016) indicates that the Akan language closely trails the English language. Though not declared 'official' in the Akan language, recognition of Akan will alleviate many language-related problems. Moreover, as is usually the case in colonial settings, Western education in Ghana runs in tandem with Christianity, a system Louis Althusser calls Colonial State Apparatuses. The overall effect was that most of those who obtained formal education graduated as Christians (MFCD 89-90). Islam, as already stated, had been a part of Ghana since the foundation of the old Ghana empire. The Mende rulers who founded ancient Ghana had

Islamic clerics and spiritualists who took part in warfare and predicted the destinies of nations during warfare. These have stayed and presently constitute the second-largest religious body in Ghana (MFCD 88-90). It is of the essence to add that, besides Christianity and Islam, African traditional religion constitutes a third of religious practices in Ghana. Though currently endangered, traditional beliefs and their followers form a part of the total populace in Ghana.

MFCD captures the religious diversity of Ghana, but it does so incompletely, failing to note traditional African religions that are still widely practiced in the country. The lack of mention of traditional beliefs overlooks the entire spiritual and cultural complexity of the religious life of the Ghanaian people, as many of them, including Christians and Muslims, continue to practice traditional spirituality (Acquah 2011). The analysis of Catholic rituals and the Latin in the Mass reveals how language has been intertwined with religion and colonialism. The comparison made between the use of English in Ghana and the church reveals other social equity and identity management concerns. Christianity and Western education appeared to have arrived in the country at the same time, just as Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses theory suggests that colonial institutions were deliberately imposed to shape the mental and spiritual infrastructure of the colony (Althusser 2024). These representations underscore the socially constructed nature of Ghanaian identity, where cultural practices and belief systems function as shared frameworks of meaning.

### **Ritual, tradition and cultural memory in Ghanaian society**

In *Cultural Criticism: Toward a Definition of Professional Praxis*, William J. Rouse (1996) defines cultural criticism as a pedagogical exercise involving an examination of political elements of society to tease out the unconscious ideologies held by society members to create a more enlightened society" (1). This section examines folk ideologies and beliefs that have subtly found their way into John Dramani Mahama's life narrative. Two events, the Simpah dance and the animal festival in Busunu, are given prominence in MFCD.

First is the Simpa dance, a musical performance among the people of Damongo, the narrator's maternal hometown. He narrates that the Simpa dance took place during the full moon period. He adds that it was a tradition used to initiate courtship. On the night of the performance, the villagers gather at an open space in the night for the dance. The young ladies, beautifully dressed up, would adorn themselves with beads, while young

boys would also put on their best appearance so that the young ladies would choose them. Young ladies dance seductively to music provided by the gathering. It was one program that the narrator and all his friends looked forward to yearly. Simpa was not only a performance for young people but also for all who were gathered. The program was always accompanied by brass band music, which was conducted by a head popularly called *conductay* (MFCD 76). As described, the Simpa dance is used socially and culturally in the narrator's maternal hometown of Damongo. It is not just a show but a significant ritual connected with courtship and social interaction. The location under a full moon on open ground also brings a certain level of mystique to the event, making it feel like an important part of their culture. The focus on looks, with young ladies decorating themselves with beads and young men in their best clothes, shows that courtship is a drama or play in this culture. The dance, done to the rhythm of a brass band, suggests a possible integration of local traditions with outside music, especially because of colonial and post-colonial musical influences in Ghana. The reference to '*conductay*' as the head of the brass band is quite interesting because it implies the local tweaking of Western music.

Besides Simpah, the animal festival in Busunu is also given a mention. The crux of the animal celebrations was that the gods came down from the sky on a particular night to feast on Earth once a year. The gods are immortals, not supposed to be seen by humans; hence, human and animal curfew is imposed in the early hours of the day. Every household was obliged to sacrifice one animal during the night of the god's visit. Though the people could take part in their sacrifice, they were to reserve the "juiciest" and most "desirable parts" of the slaughtered animals to the gods (MFCD 84-88). These two cultural narratives represent numerous festivals in Ghana (Odotei 2022). Like Simpah, there are the Dipo rites among the Ga Dangbe and Bragoro rites among the Akan. Also, like the animal festival, the people of Winneba have the Aboakyir festival and the Adei festival among the Akans. These occasions offer opportunities for people to come together and acknowledge their spirituality.

The Busunu festival is described as deeply spiritual and communal and is, therefore, rooted in the community. The idea that the gods come down from the heavens to feed on earth gives the whole event a touch of the supernatural, and at the same time, it stresses the need to sacrifice to maintain a good relationship between the gods and humans. The curfew on humans and animals demonstrates that the event is special and



the gods should not be seen to keep their mystery. The demand for every household to provide the best portions to the gods reveals the respect and exchange principles of traditional religion. This is in line with other festivals in Ghana; for example, the Aboakyir festival of the people of Winneba, where deer are hunted and offered to the gods or the Adeɛ festival of the Akans, which also entails animal sacrifices. When comparing Simpa and the animal festival with other rites like Dipo and Bragoro, the author successfully classifies these celebrations as a part of the Ghanaian cultural traditions. These festivals are not just religious celebrations; they are also platforms for people to come together and bond, identify themselves, and pass on the culture to the new generation.

### **Geography, space and the representation of national belonging**

Embedded in this autobiography is a picaresque description of selected landscapes of Ghana. As a former student of Achimota, it is not surprising that the narrator accurately describes the geographical landscape of the Achimota forest. The thickness of the forest sheltered slaves who had escaped from their captured masters (*MFCD* 42). The slaves in the forest gave its name, Achimota, a Ga word translated as “speak no name.” Though partly depleted, the Achimota forest has remained a significant landscape in the Greater Accra region.

Also, significant attention is drawn to parts of the Northern region, especially the hometown of the narrator’s mother, Damongo. The narrator writes, Damongo is my mother’s hometown, a respectable-sized village in the northern region of Ghana, at the edge of Mole, the country’s most popular game reserve (*MFCD* 18). We read;

Damongo was a sizable, though hardly bustling, town. It was, in fact, a district capital from as far back as the colonial times. ...Damongo was a wondrous place, drenched in the most vibrant array of colours. The sunset went from orange to violet, the sky was a pristine blue, save whatever feathery white clouds were floating through. Between the earth and sky were as many shades of green as imaginable, trees and bushes as shrubs and more trees, more bushes, or shrubs. Damongo is situated right next to Mole, which is the largest game reserve in the country. It occupies more than 4800 sq kilometers and nurtures hundreds of species of animals, from elephants to gazelles to butterflies, offering the sort of atmosphere that encourages a relationship with nature and reminds you that you are part of a larger cycle of creatures and events. (54-55)

He continues: Just about a kilometer from the town is Damongo Scarp Forest Reserve, home to over a hundred different species of birds (MFCD 58). The above portrays significant geographical landscapes in the nation. The narrator further reveals the seasonal dynamics in the northern region of Ghana: the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season spans May to October, whereas the dry season begins in November and stretches through April (MFCD 67). The narrator gives a detailed account of how the people of Damongo and the surrounding regions interact with the different ecosystems and describes the region's diverse ecosystems. The mention of Mole National Park and the Damongo Scarp Forest Reserve points to the conservation role in Ghana, which has diverse wildlife and natural resources. The region's rainy and dry seasons are the periodicities of life in northern Ghana, showing the region's challenges and rhythms and how they influence agricultural practices and day-to-day activities. These details suggest that the region's environment is a primary factor in determining cultural identity and livelihood and that there is a strong connection to the land and its seasons.

Again, besides introducing the geography of the setting, the narrator sheds light on the tourist potential within the enclave. First is the Larabanga mosque, believed to be the oldest mosque in West Africa and it has a rich history attached to it. It is worth noting that the Larabanga mosques appear on almost all tourist bills in Ghana. Just like the omission of traditional beliefs in religious discussions in Ghana, any discussion on tourism in the Northern region cannot be complete without duly acknowledging the Larabanga mosque. Through narrative description, space becomes a medium through which belonging, memory and national identity are constructed.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to examine the representation of Ghana in the autobiography of H. E. John Dramani Mahama. The analysis has shown that *My First Coup d'état* not only narrates the personal histories of the author and his father, but also offers a sustained account of Ghana's political, social, cultural and geographical evolution from precolonial times to the present. Social developments and historical experiences that shape the fabric of Ghanaian society are brought to the fore. Culturally, the narrative represents Ghanaians as a people who revere customary practices and acknowledge spiritual forces, while geographically it highlights the country's landscapes and tourism potential,



particularly in the northern regions. Politically, *MFCD* functions as a condensed historical narrative, tracing Ghana's trajectory from the era of Askia Dawud through colonialism, military rule and the contemporary democratic period. Mahama's account provides historical antecedents for present and future developments, revealing a cautious outlook shaped by the nation's political instability between 1966 and 1981 and an ambivalent optimism about Ghana's democratic future.

The study further demonstrates that Mahama's autobiography serves as a bridge between Ghana's complex past and its present, illuminating the socio-political turbulence of the postcolonial period and its lasting consequences for national development. The emphasis on customary traditions, spiritual beliefs, and geography underscores the importance of cultural and spiritual foundations in understanding Ghanaian values and identity. Mahama's attention to the heritage and tourism potential of northern Ghana also suggests that cultural preservation is closely tied to economic development. Politically, the narrative reflects Ghana's ongoing effort to balance democratic governance with the legacy of military intervention, a tension that has shaped both national consciousness and leadership practice in the post-coup era.

While *My First Coup d'état* offers a rich and layered account of Ghana's political and cultural history, it is important to recognise the inherent limitations of autobiographical narratives. As a personal and retrospective form of writing, autobiography is shaped by memory, selective emphasis and the author's positionality within historical and political processes. Mahama's narrative, therefore, does not present a definitive or exhaustive account of Ghanaian history but rather a particular perspective through which national experiences are interpreted and given meaning. Future research might extend this study by comparing political autobiographies across different African contexts, incorporating oral histories, archival materials or examining how readers engage with such narratives as sources of national memory. Such approaches would further illuminate the role of political life writing in shaping postcolonial identities and historical consciousness.

This article contributes to African Studies by demonstrating how political autobiography can function as a national narrative that archives political history, socio-cultural values, and spatial identity, thereby expanding critical approaches to postcolonial African life writing beyond personal memoir and political commentary. In this sense, *My First Coup d'état* emerges as a significant text in the construction of Ghanaian national identity, offering both a reflective and cautionary account of the country's political evolution while

serving as a guide for future generations committed to preserving cultural heritage and sustaining democratic stability.

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# **The Paradox of Confinement: A Philosophical Analysis of Prisons in Africa as Sites of Repression and Reformation**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the paradox of prisons in Africa, examining the complex and often contradictory roles that prisons play as sites of both political repression and reformation. Through a philosophical analysis of the major theories of punishment, the historical and contemporary use of prisons as tools of political repression, and the concept of reformation in the context of African prisons, the article reveals the deep-seated tensions and contradictions underlying the paradox of prisons in Africa. It argues that a nuanced understanding of these tensions and contradictions is essential for addressing the complex issues surrounding prisons in Africa, and for promoting more just and equitable societies.

**Keywords:** Prisons, Africa, punishment, repression, reformation, philosophy

## **Introduction**

Prisons in Africa have long been a paradoxical institution, serving simultaneously as sites of political repression and reformation. On one hand, prisons have been used as tools of colonial and post-colonial control, silencing political dissent and maintaining the power of ruling elites (Bernault 2003; Dick 2008; Cross 2021). The use of imprisonment as a means of social control has been a persistent feature of African politics, from the colonial era to the present day. For example, during the apartheid era in South Africa, prisons were used to detain and punish anti-apartheid activists, including Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison for his fight against apartheid (Mandela 1994).

Prisons have also been touted as institutions of rehabilitation and reformation, aimed at transforming offenders into productive members of society (Fajfer-Kruczek 2020). The idea of rehabilitation is based on the notion that offenders can be reformed and reintegrated into society through education, vocational training and counseling. However, the reality of prisons in Africa often falls short of this ideal. Many prisons in Africa are characterised by overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate access to basic necessities like food as well as water and healthcare (Amnesty International 2020).

This paradox raises fundamental philosophical questions about the nature and purpose of punishment, the relationship between power and confinement and the possibilities and limitations of rehabilitation. What is the purpose of punishment and how does it relate to the goals of rehabilitation and reformation? How do power dynamics shape the use of imprisonment as a means of social control? What are the implications of using prisons as sites of both repression and reformation?

Historically, the development of prisons in Africa was closely tied to the colonial project. European colonisers introduced modern prison systems to Africa as a means of controlling and disciplining local populations (Muntingh 2009). Prisons were used to suppress resistance to colonial rule, punish those who violated colonial laws and regulations, and maintain social order. The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the character and function of prisons in Africa today.

This article will explore the philosophical tensions underlying the paradox of prisons in Africa. Through a critical examination of the historical and contemporary uses of prisons in Africa, this article will analyse the philosophical implications of using prisons as sites of both repression and reformation. Specifically, this article will examine the major

philosophical theories of punishment, the relationship between power and confinement, and the possibilities and limitations of rehabilitation in the African context.

### **The philosophy of punishment**

Punishment is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been debated by philosophers for centuries. In the context of prisons in Africa, punishment is a crucial aspect of the criminal justice system. This section examines the major philosophical theories of punishment, including retributivism, deterrence and rehabilitation, as well as analysis of their implications for our understanding of the purpose and function of prisons in Africa.

#### ***Major philosophical theories of punishment***

To begin, retributivism is one of the major philosophical theories of punishment. Retributivism is a philosophical theory of punishment that holds that the primary purpose of punishment is to inflict suffering or hardship on the offender in proportion to their wrongdoing (Kant, 1790). According to Immanuel Kant, “punishment is a categorical imperative; a moral necessity that follows from the principle of justice” (Kant 1790, 105). Kant’s theory of retributivism is based on the idea of moral retribution, which holds that offenders deserve to suffer for their crimes. In the context of Africa, similar notion of retributive justice has can be seen in the Ubuntu philosophy which put emphasis on the importance of restoring balance and harmony in the society (Mbiti 1969).

However, in the context of prisons in Africa, retributivism has been used to justify harsh punishment and lengthy prison sentences in some countries. For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 1995 to investigate human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era. The TRC’s emphasis on punishment and retribution for those who committed human rights abuse reflects a retributivist approach to justice. However, retributivism has been criticized for its emphasis on punishment and retribution, which can lead to harsh and unfair treatment of offenders (Hegel 1991). For example, in Nigeria, the use of corporal punishment, such as flogging, has been criticised for its brutality and ineffectiveness in reducing crime (Amnesty International 2020). It is from such experiences that African philosophers such as Menkiti (1984) argue that justice should prioritise rehabilitation over retribution, emphasising the importance of community and social harmony.

Secondly, we have the philosophical theory punishment called deterrence. Deterrence is another philosophical theory of punishment that holds that the primary purpose of



punishment is to deter potential offenders from committing crimes (Bentham [1789] 2017). This theory developed by Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria argues that the primary purpose of punishment is to deter individuals from committing crimes. According to Bentham ([1789] 2017, 158), “the object of punishment is to prevent the commission of crimes and to deter others from committing them”. Rawls (1999) later theory of justice is based on the idea that the threat of punishment will deter people from committing crimes. In other words, a just society is one whose basic institutions would be chosen by free and equal people behind a “veil of ignorance,” leading them to adopt principles that secure equal basic liberties and arrange social and economic inequalities to benefit the least advantaged.

In the context of prisons in Africa, like in the case of retributivism, deterrence has also been used to justify harsh punishment and lengthy prison sentences as a means of deterring crime. For example, in Kenya, the government has introduced harsh punishment for corruption, including lengthy prison sentences and fines (Government of Kenya 2018). Most political activists in Africa have claimed that the aim of these punishments is to deter others from committing corruption. However, the application of this theory has been criticised for its emphasis on punishment and its failure to address the underlying causes of crime (Beccaria [1764] 2006). For example, in South Africa, the high rates of crime and violence have been linked to poverty, unemployment and social inequality (South African Police Service 2021). In this context, punishment alone may not be an effective deterrent and more attention needs to be paid to addressing the underlying social and economic causes of crime.

Furthermore, another theory that explains the philosophy of punishment is rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is a philosophical theory of punishment that holds that the primary purpose of punishment is to reform and rehabilitate the offender (Rawls 1955). Developed by John Rawls, he argues that “the primary goal of punishment is to restore the offender to a state of moral and social responsibility” (Rawls 1955, 210). Rawls’ theory of rehabilitation is based on the idea that offenders can be reformed and reintegrated into society through education, vocational training and counseling. Similarly, rehabilitation as a theory of punishment has been used to justify prison programmes in some African countries aimed at rehabilitating offenders and preparing them for reintegration into society. For example, in Rwanda, the government has introduced prison programmes aimed at rehabilitating genocide perpetrators and preparing them for reintegration into

society (International Corrections & Prisons Association. 2025). Similarly, Cameroon has introduced a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme to rehabilitate and reintegrate former combatants, including those from Boko Haram and Anglophone crises into the society.

However, rehabilitation has been criticised for its emphasis on individual reform and its failure to address the broader social and economic causes of crime (Foucault 1977). For example, in Nigeria, the high rates of recidivism have been linked to the lack of effective rehabilitation programs and the failure to address the underlying causes of crime. From the foregoing, it can be observed that the philosophy of punishment is a complex and multifaceted concept that has significant implications for our understanding of the purpose and function of prisons in Africa. While Western philosophical theories of punishment provide a useful framework for understanding the purpose and function of prisons, they must be applied with caution and sensitivity to the African context.

### ***Implications of philosophical theories of punishment for prisons in Africa***

The philosophical theories of punishment discussed above have significant implications for our understanding of the purpose and function of prisons in Africa and the world. Based on Kant's (1790, 105) observation that "punishment is a categorical imperative, a moral necessity that follows from the principle of justice", that is to say that the primary purpose of prisons is to punish offenders for their wrongdoing. It can be argued that this approach can lead to harsh and punitive prison conditions, which may not be effective in reducing recidivism or promoting rehabilitation. For example, in South Africa, the use of solitary confinement has been criticised for its harsh and inhumane conditions (Amnesty International 2020). It is from this experience that African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2024) observed that solitary confinement can have serious negative effects on the mental and physical health of prisoners.

Furthermore, deterrence as a philosophical theory of punishment implies that the primary purpose of prisons is to prevent crime by deterring potential offenders. Based on Bentham's prism that, "the object of punishment is to prevent the commission of crimes and to deter others from committing them" (Bentham [1789] 2017, 158). It can be argued that this approach can lead to lengthy prison sentences and harsh punishment, which may not be effective in reducing crime rates or promoting public safety. For example, in Nigeria, the use of capital punishment has been criticised for its ineffectiveness in reducing crime rates (Nigerian Prisons Service 2020). Similarly, the

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) declared that there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty is an effective deterrent to crime.

In the same line of reflection, meanwhile rehabilitation implies that the primary purpose of prisons is to reform and rehabilitate offenders, as Rawls (1999, 210) affirms that the primary goal of punishment is to restore the offender to a state of moral and social responsibility. This approach can also lead to prison programs aimed at promoting education, vocational training and counseling, which can be effective in reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation. For instance, as seen above the government of Rwanda has introduced prison programs aimed at rehabilitating genocide perpetrators and preparing them for reintegration into society (International Corrections & Prisons Association. 2025). Similarly, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2024) notes the importance of this program when she declared that rehabilitation programs can play a crucial role in reducing recidivism and promoting reintegration.

### ***Challenges of applying western philosophical theories of punishment to the African context***

One of the major challenges of applying Western philosophical theories of punishment to the African context is the cultural and historical context of punishment on the continent. Traditional African forms of justice and punishment, such as restorative justice and community service, may be more effective and sustainable than Western-style punishment. As the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2025) explains that traditional African forms of justice and punishment are based on the principles of restorative justice, which stresses the importance of repairing harm and promoting healing. There is, therefore, no gainsaying that each community ought to apply systems of punishments peculiar to her costumes and traditional setup.

Another challenge in applying western theories of punishment in Africa is the lack of resources and infrastructure in many African prisons. Prisons in Africa often face overcrowding, poor sanitation, and inadequate access to basic necessities like food, water and healthcare. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) notes that prisons in Africa face significant challenges in terms of overcrowding, poor sanitation and inadequate access to basic necessities. Most prisons in Kenya, Cameroon, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana and Benin among others have been criticise and have been reported to be overcrowded, lacking infrastructures and other basic necessities in recent years.

Furthermore, the application of Western philosophical theories of punishment to the African context may also be limited by the lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding. Western philosophical theories of punishment were developed in the context of Western societies and may not be directly applicable to the African context. It is from this perspective that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2025) affirms that Western philosophical theories of punishment may not be directly applicable to the African context, due to the cultural and historical context of punishment on the continent. In addition, the imposition of Western philosophical theories of punishment on African societies may also be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, which can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of punishment in African societies. This concern is echoed by scholars like Onyewuenyi (1976) who question the applicability of western philosophical frameworks to African context. He argues that the imposition of western philosophical categories on African thoughts can lead to a form of intellectual imperialism, where African ideas are force into alien frameworks, distorting their true meaning and significance (Onyewuenyi 1976, 513). In like manner, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) argues that the imposition of Western philosophical theories of punishment on African societies can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, which can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of punishment in African societies.

From these observations, it follows that the application of Western philosophical theories of punishment to the African context is a complex and challenging task. It requires a deep understanding of the cultural and historical context of punishment on the continent, as well as a willingness to adapt and modify Western philosophical theories to suit the local context.

### **Prisons as sites of political repression**

The use of prisons as tools of political repression is a longstanding phenomenon in Africa. Throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, prisons have been used to silence political opponents, suppress dissent, and maintain the power of ruling elites. We shall attempt to provide a brief philosophical evolution of this problem with insights from the historical and contemporary perspectives and then project a philosophical analysis on its implications today.

### ***The historical and contemporary use of prisons as tools of political repression***

During the colonial period, prisons were used as tools of colonial control and repression. This position is strongly supported by Fanon (1963, 52) when he says that “the colonial regime uses the prison as a means of maintaining its power and control over the colonised population”. In contemporary Africa, prisons continue to be used as tools of political repression. Many African governments use prisons to detain and silence political opponents, human rights activists, and journalists who criticise government policies or expose human rights abuses. For example, in Ethiopia, the government has used prisons to detain and torture opposition politicians, human rights activists and journalists. This observation is published in a document published by the U.S. Department of State (2019) stating that Ethiopia’s prisons are notorious for their harsh conditions and mistreatment of prisoners. In Egypt, the government has used prisons to detain and silence political opponents, including Muslim Brotherhood leaders and human rights activists. As Amnesty International (2020) notes that Egypt’s prisons are filled with people who have been detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association. In addition, the use of prisons as tools of political repression in contemporary African politics is not limited to the cases highlighted above. In contemporary African politics, prisons have become a means for governments to silence, intimidate, and eliminate political opponents, activists and dissenting voices (Amnesty International 2020). This phenomenon is not unique to Africa, but it is particularly pervasive on the continent. The use of imprisonment as a tool of political repression is often justified by governments as necessary to maintain national security, stability and order. However, this justification is often a pretext for suppressing dissent and maintaining power.

Further examples of countries and instances marking political repression through imprisonments in Africa includes, Cameroon where the government has arrested and detained numerous Anglophone activists, journalists and politicians, accusing them of separatism or terrorism, next is Burundi where, according to a report from Amnesty International in 2016, President Pierre Nkurunziza’s government has imprisoned opposition leaders, activists and journalists, often on charges of treason or terrorism (Amnesty International 2017). Furthermore, we have South Sudan where Human Right Watch reports that the government has arrested and detained numerous opposition leaders, activists and journalists, accusing them of treason or rebellion (U.S. Department of State 2019). Similarly, we have Rwanda where the government has arrested and

detained numerous opposition leaders, activists and journalists, accusing them of genocide denial or terrorism (Amnesty International 2017). Uganda is not left out; in Uganda, it is reported that the government has arrested and detained numerous opposition leaders, activists and journalists, accusing them of treason or inciting violence (U.S. Department of State 2021). It can be observed that the use of prisons as tools of political repression is a longstanding phenomenon in Africa, especially today (Government of The Gambia 2018). Throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, prisons have been used to silence political opponents, suppress dissent and maintain the power of ruling elites.

***Analysing the philosophical implications of using prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power***

The use of prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power raises significant philosophical concerns. From a moral and ethical perspective, the use of prisons as tools of political repression violates basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. According to Sartre (1989), man is condemned to be free because once thrown into the world, he is forced to choose. The use of prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power denies individuals this fundamental right of freedom to choose and to express their opinions. From a philosophical perspective, the use of prisons as tools of political repression also raises questions about the nature of power and authority in politics. It is from this point of view that Foucault (1977) argues that power is not something that is held by individuals or groups, but rather it is a complex web of relationships and structures that shape our lives. The use of prisons as tools of political repression reflects a particular exercise of power, one that seeks to maintain the dominance of ruling elites over marginalised and oppressed groups.

Furthermore, the use of prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power also raises questions about the nature of justice and morality. It is from this prism that John Rawls (1955, 3) stipulates that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. The use of prisons as tools of political repression especially in African can be seen as a total violation of basic principles of justice and morality, including the principles of equality, fairness and respect for human rights. Consequently, the use of prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power is philosophically problematic as it violates principles of justice and morality, basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, reflects a particular exercise of power that seeks to maintain the

dominance of ruling elites. This can be justified by the fact that the use of prisons to silence political dissent and maintain power is a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression, assembly, and association. So, it can be observed that this is contrary to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations 1948, Article 19).

Again, the use of prisons as sites of political repression also raises concerns about the treatment and conditions of prisoners and the impact on the mental and physical health of prisoners. Many prisoners of conscience are subjected to torture, ill-treatment and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. As the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) states in Article 1 that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (United Nations, 1984). On the impact on the mental and physical health of prisoners; it can be argued that many prisoners of conscience are subjected to prolonged periods of isolation, which can have severe psychological and physical effects. On this subject, the Heard (2019) warned that prisoners are at higher risk of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and psychosis, due to the stressful and often traumatic nature of imprisonment.

In addition, the use of prisons as sites of political repression also raises concerns about the impact on the families and communities of prisoners. Many families and communities are affected by the imprisonment of their loved ones, which can have severe economic, social, and emotional consequences. As the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (2024) notes that the imprisonment of a family member can have a devastating impact on the family, including the loss of income, social isolation and emotional trauma. From observations, it can be seen that the use of prisons as sites of political repression raises significant ethical concerns. It does not only violate human rights and fundamental freedoms, but it also raises concerns about the treatment and conditions of prisoners and has severe impacts on the mental and physical health of prisoners, as well as their families and communities.

### **Prisons as sites of reformation**

The concept of reformation in the context of African prisons is a complex and multifaceted issue. On one hand, prisons are often seen as sites of punishment and



retribution, where offenders are held accountable for their crimes. On the other hand, prisons are also seen as sites of reformation, where offenders can receive rehabilitation and reintegration into society. As the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2025) notes that prisons should be seen as sites of reformation, where offenders can receive rehabilitation and reintegration into society, rather than simply as sites of punishment and retribution.

### ***The concept of reforms in the context of African prisons***

The concept of reformation in African prisons is rooted in the idea of restorative justice, which highlights the importance of repairing harm and promoting healing, rather than simply punishing offenders and silencing dissent. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017), restorative justice is an approach to justice that focuses on repairing harm and promoting healing, rather than simply punishing offenders. This means that the goal of imprisonment is to reform the individual rather than deprive him from basic human rights there by inflicting pains for the sake of punishment rather than repairing them for reintegration.

In the context of African prisons, reformation can take many forms, including education and vocational training, counseling and therapy and community service and restorative justice programs. As the Head (2019) affirms that education and vocational training are key components of reformation programmes in African prisons, as they provide offenders with the skills and knowledge they need to reintegrate into society. For example, in Rwanda as earlier mentioned above, her government has introduced a range of reformation programmes in prisons, including education and vocational training, counseling and therapy and community service and restorative justice programmes. The success of this programme is evidently testified in the statement of the Rwanda Correctional Service (2022) that these programmes have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism and promoting reintegration into society. The concept of reformation in African prisons is, therefore, a complex and multifaceted issue. While prisons are often seen as sites of punishment and retribution, they can also be seen as sites of reformation, where offenders can receive rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

### ***The philosophical implications of using prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation***

The use of prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation raises significant philosophical implications. One of the primary concerns is the tension between



punishment and rehabilitation. According to the existentialist philosopher Sartre (1989), punishment is a form of revenge and revenge is a form of punishment. This observation raises questions about the morality and ethics of using prisons as sites of punishment, rather than solely as sites of rehabilitation.

Another philosophical implication is the concept of free will and personal responsibility. If prisons are used as sites of reformation and rehabilitation does this imply that individuals are not fully responsible for their actions? According to the German idealist and transcendental philosopher Kant (1790, 105), “the moral law is a law of freedom, and freedom is the ability to act in accordance with the moral law”. This means that any law that does not contribute to freedom and or the ability to act in accordance with the moral law is not a moral law, rather it can be seen as an anti-moral law. A good example of such law is the laws that punish without reforming or rehabilitating the individual thereby raising another significant question about the nature of free will and personal responsibility in the context of prisons and rehabilitation.

Furthermore, the use of prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation also raises questions about the role of the state in shaping individual behaviour and morality. This concern is echoed in the philosophical thoughts of Michel Foucault who argued that the state is not simply a neutral arbiter of justice, but rather an active participant in shaping individual behaviour and morality (Foucault 1977). This means that the state’s mission is to shape the behaviors and morality of her citizens since it is not a social space where justice can be acquired by nature alone. This follows that, a state that fails to fulfill this mission and subscribes to repression of individual behavior and morality is doomed to fail and its citizens will remain a constant head arch to her government. Consequently, the question of the limit of the state’s power and the balance between individual and freedom and state control is bound to emerge.

In addition, the use of prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation also raises questions about the concept of justice and morality. According to Rawls (1999, 3), justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. This raises questions about the morality and justice of using prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation. The use of prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation raises significant philosophical implications. It raises questions about the tension between punishment and rehabilitation, the concept of free will and personal responsibility, the

role of the state in shaping individual behaviour and morality, and the concept of justice and morality.

### ***Challenges and limitations of rehabilitation programmes in African prisons***

Rehabilitation programs in African prisons face numerous challenges and limitations. One of the primary challenges is the lack of resources and funding. Many African prisons lack the necessary resources and funding to provide effective rehabilitation programs. As the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2024) notes that the lack of resources and funding is a major challenge facing rehabilitation programs in African prisons.

Another challenge facing rehabilitation programmes in African prisons is the lack of trained personnel. Many African prisons lack the necessary trained personnel to provide effective rehabilitation programmes. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) notes that the lack of trained personnel is a major challenge facing rehabilitation programs in African prisons. Furthermore, rehabilitation programmes in African prisons are also limited by the lack of community-based programmes. Many African prisons lack community-based programs that provide support and services to offenders upon release. As the Head (2019) notes that community-based programs are essential for providing support and services to offenders upon release. In addition, rehabilitation programmes in African prisons are also limited by the lack of attention to the root causes of crime. Many African prisons lack programmes that address the root causes of crime, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of education. It is from this perspective that the African Development Bank (2018) hopefully notes that addressing the root causes of crime is essential for reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation. Rehabilitation programmes in African prisons face numerous challenges and limitations. These challenges and limitations include the lack of resources and funding, the lack of trained personnel, the lack of community-based programmes and the lack of attention to the root causes of crime.

### **Conclusion**

This article has explored the paradox of prisons in Africa, examining the complex and often contradictory roles that prisons play in African societies. We have argued that prisons in Africa are often used as tools of political repression, silencing dissent and maintaining the power of ruling elites. At the same time, prisons are also seen as sites of reformation and rehabilitation, providing opportunities for offenders to receive education,

training, and counseling. The implications of this paradox are profound. On one hand, the use of prisons as tools of political repression undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of punishment in African societies. It also perpetuates a cycle of violence and repression, rather than addressing the root causes of crime and social unrest.

On the other hand, the use of prisons as sites of reformation and rehabilitation offers a glimmer of hope for offenders and for African societies as a whole to progressively build a society of peace, justice and reconciliation. By providing opportunities for education, training, and counseling, prisons will not only help to reduce recidivism and promote rehabilitation but can also fight terrorism, post electoral violence, embezzlement, bribery and corruption and other vices. However, as we have argued, the challenges and limitations of rehabilitation programmes in African prisons are significant. The lack of resources and funding, the lack of trained personnel, and the lack of community-based programs all undermine the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes.

The paradox of prisons in Africa highlights the need for philosophical reflection and critique in addressing the complex issues surrounding prisons in Africa. By examining the complex and often contradictory roles that prisons play in African societies, we can gain a deeper understanding of the nature of punishment, repression and reformation in Africa. It is according to this perspective that Foucault (1977) argues that the prison is a site of power, a site of discipline and a site of punishment. However, as we have argued, the prison is also a site of reformation and rehabilitation, offering opportunities for offenders to receive education, training and counseling. In the end, the paradox of prisons in Africa highlights the need for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the role of prisons in African societies. By engaging in philosophical reflection and critique, we can gain a deeper understanding of the nature of punishment, repression and reformation in Africa, as well as work towards creating more just and equitable societies where people live in peace and harmony, where living together is practiced and valued.

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## Security Decay and the Responsibility to Protect in Africa: Historical Context, Implementation Issues and Humanitarian Urgency in the Ongoing War in Cameroon

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**Abstract:** The codification of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) at the World Summit, enshrined by the United Nations, has become one of the new dilemmas in security, humanitarian intervention and the Sovereignty of States. The human catastrophes in Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica and others underscored the need for global intervention to avert future acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Thus, R2P became the new buzzword in international humanitarian interventions; the hasty implementation and reverberations in the cases of Libya and Syria signalled that the R2P was in a grave quandary. The first section of this paper presents the historical ancestry of R2P, while the second part discusses R2P's implementation on the African continent, considering the Libyan case. Part three delves into the theoretical analysis using the English School alongside the pluralist and solidarity perspectives, and the next section seeks to determine why R2P has been compromised in the case of Cameroon. This is followed by an examination of the international consequences of the non-applicability of R2P in Cameroon and, finally, an assessment of the future of R2P on the African continent. The article reveals that the 2005 UN World Summit was a historical turning point for R2P; the rising civilian casualties in Libya prompted the speedy implementation of the R2P. France's status at the UNSC is what is murdering R2P in Cameroon because of the lack of any meaningful resolution. Increased humanitarian needs, deaths and refugee upshots flowing mostly into Nigeria are consequences, and finally, R2P's future rests on acting within the set norms. This article adds to the continuing debates over the role of R2P in international relations and humanitarian assistance.

**Keywords:** Ambazonia, Cameroon, Southern Cameroons, R2P, ICISS, United Nations

## **Introduction**

Prior to and after the formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, issues surrounding Human Rights (HR) protection became very critical. However, encumbrances, thudding with the sovereignty of the state, and the schisms during the cold war fractured a smooth follow-up of human rights. Brosig (2012, 1-2) stresses that the tragedy of the holocaust influenced the international community to adopt the UN Charter quickly. In Article 1 (para. 3) of the Charter, the UN made it obligatory for each member state to promote and encourage respect for human rights. Soon thereafter, on December 9, 1948, and a day before the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In Article 1, the UN defines genocide as “a crime under international law which they [UN members] undertake to prevent and to punish”. In Article 8, the Convention calls on UN members to take “appropriate [action] for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide”. While the adoption of the UDHR marked the beginning of the drafting and implementation of several human rights conventions within the UN system and in different regions of the world. The snail pace in the development or enactment of provisions on the protection of individuals or groups against worst human rights violations, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity underscored the urgent need for an effective mechanism to address such atrocities. Erameh and Idachaba (2017, 1) noted that in the periods before and during the cold war, intervention in the affairs of a state by another state or a group of states was strictly regarded as a violation of the non-intervention principle. During the cold war era, human rights were in a state of comatose despite the malfeasance that were committed.

A plethora of events that systematically ghastr the world in the 1990s consisted of the Rwanda genocide (1994) and Srebrenica (1995), that could have been prevented by the international community, culminated in outrageous human rights violations, thus exposing the fragility of the international and human security arrangements. Going through a litany of penance patterning to the holocaust, Rwanda and Bosnia, the legal institutionalisation of the Rome Statute in 1998 and the 2002 inauguration of the International Criminal Court tailored towards prosecuting culprits of crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes signalled a significant mile step. Many supporters perceive responsibility to protect as a timely doctrine that would help re-haul the existing UN system without changing it much. Nevertheless, years after its adoption, many are

still arguing if there is a need for it due to the lack of clarity which has led many to question its scope and application. Many are of the notion that the doctrine hinders nations from taking actions or breaches the basic tenets of international law by allowing intervention in a state's internal matters. The debate on the subject is not clear since R2P is part of soft law as it has been unanimously adopted by the General Assembly Resolution. If successfully implemented, R2P could help the UN in preventing "genocides, crimes against humanity, war crimes and mass atrocities" from taking place. The UN as it stands was established in response to the tragic events of WW2 that shocked the conscience of our common humanity (Tamvada 2010, 9).

Cameroon is a country in the Central African sub-region which Germany annexed in 1884 and administered strictly until 1916, when it was defeated in WW1 (Dze-Ngwa 2015). After the end of WW1 Germany lost, thus culminating to the partition of Cameroon between Britain and France. Britain got the land that is now known as British Southern Cameroon (Dze-Ngwa 2015) and territory was administered as a United Nations Trust Territory in 1946. In 1922, the British split British Cameroon into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons and ruled both as an integral part of Nigeria (Nfi 2011). Due to new waves of anti-colonial chants and the call for decolonization and independence especially in Africa, the UN requested all colonial masters to grant their colonies independence. The question of reunification came up, and British Southern Cameroons voted on February 11, 1961, to join La Republique du Cameroun and on October 1, 1961, the country became the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Delancey et al. 2010), with two distinct identities: English and French. For about 9 years now and counting, there has been an armed conflict in Cameroon in its two English-speaking regions, of the Northwest and Southwest. A peaceful protest that began in late 2016 of students, civil society organisations expressing their grievances on the educational, legal, political, and socio-economic situation in the two main regions quickly deteriorated. By the end of 2017, the two regions had seen the rise of a non-state armed groups, turning the situation into an armed conflict that has had a huge impact on the people living in the two English regions. A conflict in which civilians are not protected and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is not followed (Itoe 2025, 115).

The belligerents' actions do not distinguish between civilian properties and military objectives, thereby entangling civilians in the conflict. Since 2021, the state military has reportedly killed innocent civilians' multiple times (Schumann & Willis 2023). The 2023

report from the US Department of State states that both the separatist fighters (the non-state armed group) and the state military have intentionally killed civilians in the two areas of the conflict. This study underscores that the state of Cameroon, which holds the principal responsibility to protect its citizens, has markedly failed to execute this obligation in its two English-speaking regions. International Humanitarian Law states that governments are mainly responsible for making sure that their people are safe and sound during armed conflict (UN Security Council 2006). The war that started in 2016 in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon shows how the government has failed to protect civilians, as shown by reports on human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings and people being forced to leave their homes (Human Rights Watch 2020).

R2P has metamorphosed to be a very critical philosophical dictum globally since its tenets seeks to ostracised mass atrocities, crimes against humanity, genocide. However, in most countries particularly in Africa where conflicts are rampant, R2P faces a lot of stress due to its inapplicability and security decay orchestrated by the major powers. The unending violence and mass atrocities committed in Cameroon's Anglophone regions since 2016 signals one of the clearest forms of such security dilemma. The independence of La Republique du Cameroun on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1960 and the subsequent gaining of independence of Former British Southern Cameroons on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1961, was followed by the formation of a Federation in 1961 led to the abrogation of the Union in 1972. Thus, historical and political discontents in Cameroon, the eminent discrimination and the marginalisation of the Anglophones is rooted in the conflict.

### **Historical ancestry of R2P**

In 1999 at the UN General Assembly, former Secretary General Kofi Annan posed undoubtedly critical and deep question to the world leaders. As stated, "...if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systematic violations of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity?" (ICISS 2001, vii). With its relevance, the question appealed to the concern of the Government of Canada and other actors. This paved the way for a major premise in the establishment of an International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). In December 2001, ICISS proposed a framework to seek support from the Secretary General and the international community to find new common ground (ICISS 2001, viii) to deal with grave mass atrocities.

Erameh and Idachaba (2017, 2) emphasised that, though first muted in 2001, the concept of R2P gained greater prominence in 2005 following the outcome at the United Nations World Summit Document. The Summit unanimously adopted R2P as a guiding principle to intervene in civil conflicts where respective states fail to protect its citizens. It also empowers states, regional organisation and international institutions to play a key role in the R2P process. While the authority to employ last resort and intervene militarily rest solely on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the general assembly. The concept, was however adopted by large numbers of states in 2009 and since the adoption of R2P, it has been invoked during the post-election violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe crises. However, Libya remains the real first theatre where the doctrine was fully invoked through Resolution 1970 and 1973 respectively. The R2P in this scenario has come up as one of the most sophisticated doctrines of global politics (Pant 2012, 4; Adjei 2018, 191). It obliges states to respect, protect and implement the instruments of human rights (ICISS 2001, XI). The concept has created strong waves in the international political discourse. Some argued that the idea of military intervention is a threat to the sovereignty of any nation. Particularly with UNSC as a centre point in addressing such intervention, it was also feared that the implementation of R2P would bear serious consequences to the weak nations in the name of humanitarian intervention (Focarelli 2008; Pant 2012, 7).

Bellamy (2012, 11-12), in line with the genealogy of R2P, stated that the UNSC reaffirmed the principle in Resolution 1674 (2006). After an admittedly long struggle, the UN General Assembly agreed on a resolution to continue considering the principle (A/63/308, 7 October 2009) and its implementation in 2009. The UNSC reaffirmed the principle again in 2009 (Resolution 1894), and the UN established a Joint Office for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. Meanwhile, Brosig (2012, 2) held that in reality, though, the notion of 'sovereignty as responsibility' had entered the 'protection discourse' in the early 1990s. However, it was in 2001 that the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) produced its seminal report, which is now known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This report, with its emphasis on sovereignty as responsibility, significantly influenced the international discourse on humanitarian interventions and the limits of the principle of non-interference in situations where a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity or ethnic cleansing.

According to the ICISS report, R2P encompasses three pillars, namely:

- i. The responsibility to prevent: to address both the root causes and direct causes of internal conflict and other man-made crises putting populations at risk.
- ii. The responsibility to react: to respond to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures, which may include coercive measures like sanctions and international prosecution, and in extreme cases military intervention.
- iii. The responsibility to rebuild: to provide, particularly after a military intervention, full assistance with recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation, addressing the causes of the harm the intervention was designed to halt or avert.

Furthermore, the ICISS developed the so-called 'precautionary principles', which aim at curtailing potential misuse of military interventions, foreseeing the politically highly contested content of R2P. The four principles are:

- i. Right intention: The primary purpose of the intervention, whatever other motives intervening states may have, must be to halt or avert human suffering. The right intention is better assured with multilateral operations, clearly supported by regional opinion and the victims concerned.
- ii. Last resort: Military intervention can only be justified when every non-military option for the prevention or peaceful resolution of the crisis has been explored, with reasonable grounds for believing lesser measures would not have succeeded.
- iii. Proportional means: The scale, duration and intensity of the planned military intervention should be the minimum necessary to secure the defined human protection objective.
- iv. Reasonable prospects: There must be a reasonable chance of success in halting or averting the suffering which has justified the intervention, with the consequences of action not likely to be worse than the consequences of inaction.

This ICISS report attempts to reconcile the existing tension between state sovereignty and the need to remedy the situation of those facing the worst human rights violations. Still, R2P remains one of the most contested norms internationally. In legal terms, it was



never codified to the same extent as classical human rights law since it does not have legal quality. Nonetheless, R2P received significant political acceptance through its integration into the World Summit Outcome Document adopted by consensus in 2005.

Article 138: Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.

Article 139: The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, to help protect populations from war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organisations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We stress the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law. We also intend to commit ourselves, as necessary and appropriate, to helping States build capacity to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.

Article 140: We fully support the mission of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide (Hanns Seidel Foundation et al. 2012, 14-15). It was a response both to a series of mass atrocities – in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and elsewhere – and to substantive disagreement about what ought to be done in response by the international community. It is worth noting that, in the 1990s, some states had sought to stretch the bounds of peacekeeping, a practice established in the early 1960s, and normally mandated by the

UN Security Council (UNSC), to encompass something akin to 'peace enforcement', in which international forces tried to make peace by disarming local combatants, rather than simply ensuring peace agreements were kept (Hall 2018, 174) citing Jane Boulden (2001). "Today, the responsibility to protect is a concept, not yet a policy, an aspiration, not yet a reality. Curbing mass atrocities will neither be easy nor quick. There is no certain blueprint for getting the job done. We are all novices in this field" (Ban Ki Moon 2008).

With the backing of Kofi Annan, the HLP's thinking on R2P helped frame the discussion about sovereignty, human rights, and intervention at the 2005 World Summit meeting, convened to debate UN reform, the Millennium Development Goals, terrorism and several other issues. Ultimately, the World Summit Outcome Document endorsed R2P, but not after considerable negotiation and modification to what had been proposed by the ICISS and HLP. As Bellamy notes, the Permanent Five (P5) on the UNSC – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – were divided among themselves. China and Russia took a conservative view, arguing that the UNSC was already sufficiently empowered by the Charter and opposed the idea that R2P might be used as a means to circumvent a P5 veto. By contrast, France and the UK argued that interventions not authorised by the UNSC due to a P5 veto ought to be permitted in certain circumstances. The US, for its part, was concerned about the prescriptiveness of the ICISS and HLPs' conceptualisations of R2P, which they feared might 'constrain,' as Bellamy puts it, 'it is right to decide when and where to use force' (Hall 2018, 174 citing Bellamy, 2005). Resolutions 1970 and 1973 on Libya and 1975 on Côte d'Ivoire used R2P language to lay out the UNSC's responses to the conduct of President Muammar Gaddafi's government and President Laurent Gbagbo's use of force against civilians supportive of his political opponents. UNSCR 1973 was particularly significant because it not merely imposed a no-fly zone but also authorised the use of 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians under Chapter VII (Hall 2018, 177).

In 2009, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Adviser on R2P, Edward Luck released a report titled 'Implementing Responsibility to Protect' in the sixty-third session of UN General Assembly, which came up with a 'three-pillar strategy'. Pillar one suggested on the 'protection responsibilities of the State.' Pillar two highlighted on the 'international assistance and capacity building' and pillar three projected on the 'timely and decisive response' through the Security Council in a manner consistent with

Chapter VI (pacific measures), Chapter VII (enforcement measures), and Chapter VIII (regional arrangements) of the UN Charter 18, in situation where a state has manifestly failed to protect its population from the four crimes viz. genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

### **Methodological framework**

This article makes use of qualitative data collection technique in its research design in the collection of data emanating mostly from secondary sources. The data collected were derived from journals, articles, websites, legal UN documents and alongside U.S. State department reports on the situation in Cameroon, among others. The article analysed those documents that focused on R2P symbiotically and its application on different cases especially in Africa and also provided an insight on past and current debates surrounding R2P. More so, it espoused the thoughts of the architects of R2P doctrine. Within Africa, the rationale for using Cameroon as our case study is based on the country's unique identity, geostrategic position, its bi/dual colonial history, longevity of the conflict, and lack of the applicability of R2P in Cameroon. Meanwhile if it were other African states the enforcement of R2P via the security council would have taken action(s) by adopting resolutions ranging from political and economic sanctions to no-fly zone, among others. A cardinal justification why RSP doctrine in Cameroon has failed event though it has not been applied is because of the role of Paris as a permanent member with a veto power at the UN Security Council which makes it impossible for the case to be fully heard and a resolution to be passed. Also, Biya's government has warm tidings with lobbyists across the globe hence downplaying the intensity of the conflict internationally making it to be seen as an internal affair of the state.

### ***The English School***

The English School of thought is the theoretical framework of this paper and it utilises both the pluralist and solidarist perspectives synthetising it with R2P in the Former British Southern Cameroons scenario aka "Ambazonia". The English School of thought emerged in the field of International Relations in the 1970s. This theory's analysis is based on three concepts: the international system, international society, and the world society. The international system is based on Hobbesian and Machiavellian principles, which focus on power politics among states. The international society, on the other hand, is rooted in Grotian ideas, which emphasise shared interests and the institutionalisation of identity. In contrast, the world society originated from the Kantian

school, which focuses on individuals, non-state organisations and the global population. The international society is the most developed section of the English School. It lies on the principle that there is a society of states (Buzan 2001, 471-475). The English School expresses pluralist ideas and this is based on an international society, which is grounded in institutions, rules, interests and values (Little 2000, 395).

The English School is dominated by two main versions: the pluralist and solidarist versions. In the pluralist view, issues are conceptualised through the realist direction of rationalism. This version of the school view states' sovereignty in terms of "political difference and distinctiveness". In this regard, international society is considered to have a minimal scope based on the international order in an anarchical society (Buzan 2001, 478). In other words, this version of the school does not disregard anarchy, however, it emphasises that despite states' self-interest, they play a crucial role in maintaining order through cooperation. The pluralists also argue that humankind differs, and as such, their religious views, ethnic, and linguistic traditions differ. These differences, according to the pluralists, are contained in a society that allows for the greatest possible independence of states, which can, in their form of government, express those differing conceptions of the good life. This conception of society is structured towards promoting peaceful societies. To promote a peaceful society, pluralists stress against breaching national sovereignty because, to the pluralists, such action is dangerous for states to cooperate (Linklater 2005, 97-98). In view of that, pluralists confine to states sovereignty agreement, promote diplomacy and non-intervention (Buzan 2001, 478). In sum, pluralist society focuses on coexistence principles to respect, equality and freedom for each other.

The solidarist on the other hand, argues that the society of state should be more prone to causes of human rights and perhaps, emancipation as opposed to the right of states to political independence and non-intervention of the states' internal affairs. Also, solidarism pays attention to the revolutionist side of rationalism which focuses on shared moral norms necessary for understanding international orders. Such intervention is considered necessary based on human rights and justice for the vulnerable. However, the solidarists does not specify clearly when to apply force and the limitation on the use of force (Buzan 2001, 478). According to Linklater, solidarism is 'premature' because there is no consensus on whether state interventions should be made in response to human rights violations (Linklater 2005, 93). Additionally, solidarists focus on individuals,

norms, and values to help explain and understand the world. It is worth noting that the English school differs from realism; however, it does not deny the primacy of the state in international affairs. The solidarist societies, as noted by Linklater, share common moral principles. According to the English school, the 'primacy of basic social order' refers to the idea that social norms and values are the foundation of international relations, shaping state behaviour and interactions (Linklater 2005). The norms that guide states' activities are also coded in international law. This has made some critics to question how international laws should rule over sovereign states.

Moreover, the English school emphasise that the most stable and secure societies are the ones dominated by togetherness and sense of cooperation. In this regard, vibrant institutions and norms are essential to harmonise societies and institutions as noted, promote rules and mechanisms to maintain orderliness (Linklater 2005). Arguably, international law provides legal measures to ensure orderliness in international affairs, and the Ambazonia situation is not an exception; however, the theory fails to point out that enforcement problems about international law will create disorder. Also, the English School exposed IR researchers to broader dimensions in analysing international issue and recognises that there is anarchy in the international arena does not mean disorder and confusion. As critical as it is for the Anglophone regions of Cameroon's case, it is expected that the international community gives the primary attention in addressing the confusion and atrocities associated with the conflict since the theory is limited on how it gives concrete measures on states' sovereignty and human rights violations, the people two Anglophone regions of Cameroon remain in the dilemma of survival and justice since the inapplicability of R2P has fallen short of its grandeur motifs especially looking at how the conflict has progressed into its nine year and counting.

Analytically, the scenario in Cameroon presents a critical situation where the international community should prioritise the protection of minorities who are of the two Anglophone regions. In this light, the international norms are supposed to strengthen justice for the vulnerable and recognise conditions that promote peace and solidarity among states and societies. In terms of justice, English speaking regions of Cameroonians are denied political, legal, and socio-cultural rights, hence the call for autonomy geared towards the establishment of peace. The English school in this sense help to understand the dilemma as far as the tension within in the conflict in Cameroon's English-speaking regions is concerned. International institution such as the UN and AU

is called upon to use constructive diplomatic measure to ensure conflict and peace building. Such constructive measure can be done through effective dialogue between the Cameroonian government and the leaders of the Southern Cameroons independence movement. Although the case of the Anglophone region of Cameroon is rooted in history of territorial divisions of the British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon during the colonial era, safeguarding and understanding the critical concerns of the Anglophone minority are crucial in establishing lasting peace. The mechanism for ensuring peace should focus on better integration and identity preservation.

### **R2P's implementation: A reflection on Africa**

With the failure to act in Rwanda, the tide shifted on a positive dimension when mapping how R2P has been rigorously implemented on the African continent, particularly in the most recent past, with Ivory Coast and Libya coming into play. Since 2005, Libya and Côte d'Ivoire have been the two cases in which the UNSC has invoked the non-consensual provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter to mandate the international community to 'use all necessary means to enforce the protection of civilians. In the case of Libya, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) undertook a military campaign to implement UNSC Resolution 1973 (2011), aimed at protecting civilians protesting the Gaddafi regime (Brosig 2012, 5). The failure to intervene or slow intervention in internal armed conflicts that occurred in the 1990s, despite the accompanying complex humanitarian emergencies, led to the introduction of the African Union Constitutive Act of 2000 by African leaders and the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the international level. Even though Africa leaders did not use the concept of responsibility to protect, the language of Article 4 (h) and (j) of the aforementioned Act suggests that the AU was also concerned about the move from noninterference to not in - the difference in member's states affairs. At a regional level, the African union constitutive act resonated in this regard (Erameh & Idachaba 2017, 2).

The R2P 'lens' was used to guide the international community's diplomatic response to post-election violence in Kenya in 2008, but faltering efforts to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Darfur – widely seen as a spectacularly failed test case for R2P – led to more suggestions that the principle was 'dead'. However, R2P was trusted to the fore in 2011 as the UNSC took measures to resolve humanitarian crises in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire. Some member states complained that the UN/France in Côte d'Ivoire and NATO in Libya had exceeded their mandate to protect civilians in those countries. In the sense

that the actions of the external powers were considered as a use of force to change regimes in the two countries. The architects pledged to take a harder line in future by resisting efforts to apply coercive measures on states that fail in their responsibility to protect their own populations. According to those who continue to predict R2P's demise, one of the consequences is the international community's failure to find a meaningful consensus on the situation in Syria. In short, the functionality and legitimacy of the UN and its agencies chiefly focus on its amplitude in protecting humanity from the four deadly atrocities whether or not the UN has the mandate to successfully implement R2P. The African continent has seen the implementation of R2P executed by the UNSC in the case of Libya and France's role in Ivory coast. Regarding humanitarian intervention, it has become a source of debate, both when it has been carried out in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and when its inapplicability failed such as in Rwanda.

The NATO intervention in Libya sparked much debate, especially among international relations scholars while some concern themselves with the justification for NATO's action, others focus on the legality of the intervention. In contrast, others have focused on the means, intentions, and outcomes of these interventions and from a constructivist perspective, James Pattison draws on the just cause principle as outlined in the ICISS document to justify the Libya intervention. As he puts it, "Gaddafi regime had shown its readiness to massacre his people through the initial killing of 1,000 to 10,000 people (Erameh & Idachaba 2017, 3). Nobody today questions the basic principles that states have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that when they fail to do so, the international community should take action to provide protection. It is the question of finding international consensus on how best to realise these goals in the inherently difficult and complex situations that confront us today (Hanns Seidel Foundation et al. 2012, 13).

### ***R2P and the conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone region***

Globalization has drastically changed the world we live crisscrossing the internal matters of a state's action thus culminating to international interference. Thus, state sovereignty has ceased to be an exclusive matter within its jurisdiction from political, economic, legal, and socio-culturally. Furthermore, the nature of wars has dynamically changed since the twentieth century; between states, to within states, and often states are perpetrators of human rights violations of their citizens. Primarily established for



peace and security concerns, the UN is now more concerned with human security issues within states. Nevertheless, national sovereignty posits a great challenge (Tamvada 2010, 12). The conventional wisdom holds that the adoption of R2P in Africa would help promote the protection of civilians, but some sceptics do not subscribe to such an assertion. In the case of R2P's applicability in Africa, it does not make political power responsible but rather allows those with power to act in a politically irresponsible manner, at the cost of democracy and, often, peace. R2P can promote political irresponsibility due to two factors: first, it tends to reduce all politics in Africa to the issue of adequate protection capacity; second, it makes the legitimacy of the African state subject to determination by the "international community" according to vague moral standards. The lack of accountability to those whose rights are supposedly being protected by African citizens is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed. Moralization and externalisation of African politics undermine democracy and set the stage for African and Western political actors to avoid having to justify their actions politically or to face the consequences of their actions.

They concluded that political power will only be made responsible when it is held accountable by those who are subject to it. To this end, he proposes replacing sovereignty as responsibility with popular sovereignty as a way of democratising the R2P discourse even if at the cost of R2P itself (Erameh & Idachaba 2017, 5). The non-applicability of R2P principles in the ongoing war in Cameroon's English-speaking regions is plagued by a number of negative consequences, including:

- Escalation of violence and gross human rights violations: Without the protection of the international community, individuals and communities in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon continue to be vulnerable to extreme violence, abuse, and exploitation orchestrated by Biya's security forces and by the Southern Cameroons defence forces.
- Lack of accountability: Without the application of R2P, those responsible for human rights violations and acts of violence may not be held accountable for their actions at home and abroad since the justice system in the country is unable to hold those to account and thus, the ICC is required to get the actors on both sides of the radar to account.
- Deteriorating humanitarian situation: The absence of R2P has resulted to an exacerbated and already dire humanitarian situation in the two regions of

Cameroon, causing further suffering of the people with some internally displaced and others as refugees.

- Weakened international cooperation: The systematic failure in the implementation of R2P in the ongoing war waged on the Anglophone regions of Cameroon by the Biya's regime is eroding international trust and cooperation in addressing conflicts and protecting human rights as the conflict continuous for about a decade and counting.
- Ineffectiveness in resolving conflicts: The non-applicability of R2P would hinder efforts to resolving the conflict in Cameroon, bringing lasting solutions and peace to that part of Africa. It should be noted that the failure of the Grand National Dialogue held by the government of Cameroon and also a purported dialogue and mediation process organised by the Government of Canada, the initiator of R2P has not led to any fruits in regards to quenching the flames of the conflict thus signalling a bad fate of Biya's regime in embracing an international dialogue and mediation with the Southern Cameroons leadership in prison and the diaspora.

The inapplicability of R2P in Cameroon has significant implications of the country and on the people of Former British Southern Cameroons. Such a failure highlights the importance of ensuring the effective implementation of R2P in conflicts zone where respective states have ignored or supported the violation of human rights against minority groups.

### **Findings and discussions**

In terms of the findings, a fraught landscape of R2P doctrine in the African scenario with a specific focus on Cameroon is pivotal. To begin, it maps out that the foundational doctrine of R2P as a normative norm at the World Summit in 2005, because of the failure of the international community to act in both the conflict in Rwanda and Srebrenica, thus depicting a deflection from state sovereignty to sovereignty as a state's responsibility. Furthermore, the hastiness and the speedy evocation of military intervention in Libya all in the name of R2P under UNSC Resolution 1973 was discussed. However, it starkly contradicts the inapplicability of these set norms of R2P in Cameroon despite the Biya regime's failure in protecting the civilian population from a wide range of atrocities, violence, targeted and extrajudicial killings alongside the displacement of the population in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

More so, another major finding this article pinpoints are the root causes and the inconsistent nature of R2P norms, but also the geopolitical bias in terms of its enforcement. It highlights the UNSC and the veto power held by P5 members, thus culminating towards the choking of R2P politically. The paper posits that France's colonial pact with Cameroon and its veto power contributes gigantically to downplaying any succinct UNSC Resolution in the conflict in Cameroon making R2P doctrine inert. This political polarisation of R2P defeats the legality and unique autonomy of the institutions charged with its implementation because its activation aligns with interests and aspiration of great powers as against the fundamental goal of human security and humanitarian doctrine.

In addition, the article revealed that the selective bias in the non-enforcement in the case of Cameroon in terms of R2P mechanisms has culminated to security gaps thereby ushering in waves of violence, deteriorating human suffering, destruction of properties, and massive refugee influx mostly into Nigeria. The prevalence of the conflict has seen the enactment and utilisation of barbaric counter-insurgency and secessionist violence thus compromising the security of civilians by the state security forces. This reluctance by the international community has gigantically demonstrate that the civilian population have been abandoned in the midst of the belligerents to faint for themselves regarding their survival.

Moreover, with the applicability of the English School as our theoretical lens, the paper reveals that the conflict in Cameroon unveils a dichotomous line between pluralist and solidarist thoughts in the international society. The upholding and respect of sovereignty and non-intervention by the pluralist scholars has been championed by states with the likes of Cameroon as it enjoys support from allies triumphantly over collective human rights doctrine as held by the solidarist school of thought. This friction stands unresolved and leaves the denizens in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon in a political limbo for survival and justice. This work therefore concludes that the R2P's future in Africa is an opaque and oblique one since it runs into danger as the norms guiding it is set for rejection because of its selective and corrosive bias in its enforcement. This interest-ridden norm would downplay its legitimacy exposes and the core values shattered due to false and bias operationalisation.

Per the discussions on the inapplicability of R2P in Cameroon, this paper lays the foundational interconnectedness of three themes which range from, R2P as a normative

thought in today's sovereign-centric system, the African dilemma in regard to R2P been selective, and the prospects of R2P in preventing mass atrocities. First, the Cameroon-Libya contrast strongly highlights R2P's "soft law" dilemma. It has attained tremendous rhetorical unanimity, but its operationalisation is tied to Westphalian sovereignty. The UNSC is a political forum where strategic interests intersect, as the conversation shows. The paper's identification of French veto power as the blocking mechanism is a microcosm of a systemic flaw: R2P uses individuals who may be actively involved in or benefiting from regional political dynamics. This raises the question: can a principle meant to transcend politics work when activated politically? Also, the paper discussed the complicated role of African regional organisations. Article 4(h) of the African Union's Constitutive Act suggests a possible way for more legitimate and culturally sensitive action to take place. The paper concluded that the African Union is "ineffective" in Cameroon, showing that there is still a gap between what people want and what politicians are willing to do on the continent. This raises questions about how well African countries work together, how past colonial powers have affected AU member states, and how hard it is to reach an agreement against an existing government. The discussion centres also on the clash between the idealistic opinion of "African solutions to African problems" and the real-life broken political situation on the continent, where the principle of non-interference is often implemented by the UNSC.

Moreover, the paper highlights the two belligerents involved in the conflict in Cameroon especially with the Biya's security forces unleashing full force on the civilian population. With the high handiness of the Cameroon security forces on unarmed civilians, the military response pillar by the international community under the doctrine of R2P is paralyzed. Also, as the conflict continuous the utilisation of diplomatic pressure, sanctions targeting the main actors on the ground, creating humanitarian channels, and calling for the investigation of war crimes, crimes against humanity among others by the international Criminal Court is absent. The authors discussed and underpinned the need for an all-inclusive political dialogue as against the previous one-sided Grand National dialogue that has failed to produce any concrete remedy to the conflict but exacerbated it. Since the conflict is founded on historical political, economic and socio-cultural grievances and marginalisation, a robust solution would tackling the foundational identity and finding a political solution to the conflict, a duty that entails the coming on board of

the government of Cameroon, the Anglophone leadership and the international community as facilitators through a conflict and mediation process.

In a nutshell, R2P norms and its implementation is undergoing a monumental shift due to geopolitical bias in its applicability and inapplicability. The inapplicability of R2P in Cameroon does not outlaw the norms but challenges the primary basic functionality of R2P. R2P has thus become a normative benchmark in human security on the global front as a framework geared at mobilising humanitarian and diplomatic resources is subjected to naming or shaming by both advocates and critics. The architects of R2P may have been inspired by the need to rescue humanity from the atrocities of conflict, however the uncomfortable illumination of the norm has been exposed by gaps in its implementation all thanks to geopolitical interests, selective bias in its implementation, and the lack of resources among others leaving R2P as a lame-dog concept.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This article elaborately exonerates the genealogical evolution, the English school of thought, the contested enforcement, and profound humanitarian effects of R2P principle, paying a particular attention on the raging conflict in Cameroon's English-speaking regions. The paper chartered that while R2P was founded as a normative response to past mass atrocities like in the case of Rwanda and Srebrenica, its enforcement is heavily contested due to politisation and selective bias. The paper unpacked a stark contrast of R2P which was invoked in the Libyan situation, yet the bias nature of R2P is conspicuously inapplicable in Cameroon in spite of hard-core evidence of war crimes, mass atrocities, and the failure of the government of Cameroon to protect its civilian population. This disjunction arises due to geopolitical interests with the role of France in Cameroon's internal affairs and veto power at the UN Security Council. This double standard discredits R2P's credibility and jeopardizes the core debates that exist between state sovereignty and international humanitarian obligations.

The Cameroonian scenario in the case of the ongoing war in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon epitomises the dire effects of the selective inapplicability of R2P, thus culminating to increase violence, humanitarian attention and attrite international order. The paper earmarks that R2P's future in Africa hinges on the depolarisation and depoliticisation in its enforcement while validating frequent action under a set of legal and established norms. In a nutshell, the doctrine of R2P has metamorphosed from an "aspirational" dictum to becoming a relevant international tool in the study of human

security and the global community must act politically while uniformly prioritising the protection of civilian over neocolonial strategic interests.

Given the inapplicability of R2P in the case of the conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, this study suggests that there should be an increase in peace and conflict negotiations mechanism due to the failure of the Grand National Dialogue. In addition, there should be an increase in humanitarian aid to meet the dire needs of internally displaced persons and refugees across neighbouring countries. Finally, the UN, AU, regional organisations, and civil society should collaborate in terms of capacity building mechanisms that seek to support solutions geared at justice, peace, stability, and security efforts.

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