

## Reimagining the Future of Higher Education Institutions in Peace and Conflict Management Processes in Africa

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### **Abstract**

*Today's predominant pattern of conflicts (including protest actions) is proving more complex for African governments to manage constructively. This paper attempts to reimagine the future of higher education institutions in peace and conflict management processes in African countries through a retrospective and prospective analysis of the management of State University students' protests in Cameroon. In order to do so adequately, it uses selected episodes of the management of students' protests in state universities in Cameroon with an analytical focus on the case of the University of Buea, in the South-West Region of Cameroon. The fundamental question addressed is: how can higher education institutions change the course of conflict events so as to produce a better and brighter future for African Universities in particular and the African continent at large? To generate the necessary data for analysis, the paper adopts an exploratory qualitative research design, organized around a critical review of relevant literature and empirically grounded in primary data (involving the use of interviews and observations) collected periodically within a ten (10) year interval (2006 and 2016) and secondary data (from newspaper articles, books and internet reports). Data is analyzed by way of content analysis, thematically and the use of word verbatim. The paper finds out that higher education institutions in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, without peace and conflict management capacities are vulnerable and exposed to the possibilities of important damages and losses (both in human and material terms). As such, the paper concludes that reimagining a positive future for higher education institutions in peace and conflict management processes in Africa must begin by advocating for a shift of paradigm, from a culture of building "peace by violent means" to building "peace by peaceful means" through inclusionary democratic governance practices in African Universities for the sustainable peace and development of the Africa "WE WANT" by the African Union Agenda 2063. The findings have important policy implications for African governments and international education stakeholders.*

**Key words:** *Capacities for Peace, Conflict Management, Higher Education Institutions, Students' Protests, Peace, Universities*

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## Introduction

It is undoubtedly true that in recent decades, Africa has been witnessing various types of conflicts, which are manifested in strikes, revolts, disputes, fights, wars etc. This has been the case in countries such as, Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Nigeria, etc. Furthermore, when one takes a keen look at situations such as the mere teachers and lawyers peaceful protest that metamorphosized into open and a bloody civil war that has been going on now for close to eight (8) between Government security forces and Non-state armed groups (NSEG) in the English speaking North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon, or again peaceful university students' protests in the same country and other parts of Africa that have transformed into killings of students by state security forces, one can easily jump to the conclusion that a "culture of peace" developed through inclusive dialogue and constructive conflict management mechanisms has remained a major handicap for many African governments and higher education institutions

As defined by the United Nations, "Culture of Peace" is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent (violent) conflict by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and Nations ( UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace). Evidently, whatever the nature of conflict, whether through strikes, disputes or wars (be it intra-state or inter-state), there are immediate and post-conflict repercussions which may weigh heavily on the entire continent. In any case, the task of all concerned is not merely to apportion blames for the numerous conflicts in Africa on each other, but to search for collaborative ways of understanding their underlying causes and tackling them adequately. Besides this, there is the whole question of the absence of an effective conflict management mechanisms and infrastructures for peace in most African Countries and universities that could foster a culture of peace at all levels of society.

The type of conflict which this paper chooses to duel on is that of University students' protests in Africa with a particular focus on Cameroon, since a protest/strike is a form of conflict with causes and effects. But one might ask, why focus on conflicts at the University level in Africa? For this question, the reasons are vast but some of the most potent reasons are that, the University system in Africa as a whole and Cameroon in particular has made itself a focal point for competition between opportunist politicians. To this end, it is not surprising that a simple and peaceful student protest in parts of Africa such as Cameroon, Nigeria, most at times, degenerate into violent action (between state security forces and the striking students), with disastrous human and material consequences. This is especially through in the case of Cameroon where peaceful students' protests are generally met with police brutality in state universities, rape and the killings of innocent students.

More significantly, it goes without saying that, education is the foundation of development and democracy in every culture and any continent. Bush (2000) for one, noted that education is the key to a more peaceful and prosperous future for all countries and especially important in areas of conflict or extreme poverty, where children see beyond the world of hate and hopelessness.

This paper thus, assumes that higher education plays a vital role in formulating, disseminating, or sustaining ideas that influence and shape both the socio-economic and political developments in Cameroon and other African countries. This role can only be firmly consolidated through the promotion of sustainable peace and security within the continent. Reflecting concern over this background information, this paper is out, in search for the conditions and capacities for peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa by rethinking the role of Higher Education in Conflict Management and Peace processes. Hence, the fundamental question this paper seeks to address is: *how can higher education institutions change the course of conflict events so as to produce a better and brighter future for African Universities in particular and the African continent as a whole ?* This paper carries out a retrospective and prospective analysis of the 2005 State University students' strikes in Cameroon with a focus on the dynamics and management of the case of the University of Buea (then, the only Anglo-Saxon University in the Cameroon) as an entry point to address the above research question. Perhaps this is because the case of the University of Buea is more illuminating and compelling. In fact, building resilient societies and universities and preventing the breakout of tensions into violent manifestations requires garnering peace capacities and skills to resolve conflict peacefully. The idea is to identify the policy and management gaps in (violent) conflict prevention and peacebuilding that need to be addressed in African universities in order to contribute to infrastructures for peace in Cameroonian universities in particular and African higher education institutions as a whole. After this introduction, this article is organized around eight (8) interconnected sections that build on each other, before arriving at its logical conclusion.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1. Understanding the Concept of Conflict and Its dynamics.**

To overcome the challenges conflict transformation specialists, organizations, institutions, and administrators face coming to terms with the nature of conflicts, there is need to start with an adequate understanding of the concept of conflict and its dynamics

Human history is full of stories of war and violent conflict. War has been waged for all purposes including preservation of territories from attack, expansion of empires, punishment of enemies and defense of allies ( Jeong, 2000, p. 53). However, it is important to note here that the concept of conflict may point to diverse directions depending on the situation. According to one group of scholars, conflict is taken to mean the clashing of overlapping interests (positional differences) around national values and issues ( independence, self-determination, borders and territory, access to or distribution of domestic or international power etc); the conflict has to be of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties( states, groups of states, organizations, or organized groups) that are determined to pursue their interests and win their case. Possible instruments used in the course of conflict are negotiations, authoritative decisions, threat, pressure, passive or active withdrawals and the use of physical violence and war ( Pfetsch and Rohloff, 2000, p. 27). This definition points mostly to international warfare, but as far as this paper is concerned, conflict is taken to mean an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change.

it is an expression of the heterogeneity of interest, values and beliefs and arise as new

formation generated by social change come up against inherited constraints but the way we deal with conflict is a matter of habit and choice, it is possible to change habitual responses and exercise intelligent choices (Miall et al., 1999, p. 5)

This definition points to the fact that as long as human interaction is concerned conflict is inevitable and conflict is an integral aspect of human life, existing at all levels of society, individual, group, institutions, national and international relations. It also stands out to reason that conflict in the strict sense of the term is not a real problem, what is problematic about conflict is its explosion into violence. And the reason for this may be attributed to the inability or failure to accommodate and resolve contradictions in society through arrangements and procedures that eliminate their negative effects and maximize their positive effects. The argument is that aggressions and anti-social behaviors are stimulated by social circumstances. Hence, the needs of university students that are frustrated by institutions and norms require satisfaction. It is only if needs satisfaction is the problem (such as students demands in a strike action as the case of universities in Africa) that conflict resolution can be justified and hence the need for building key stakeholders' capacities for peace.

### **1.2 (Violent) Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in intra-state conflicts.**

For understanding and determining the functional mechanism of conflict prevention, Guha (2002, p.141) holds the view that one should understand deeply the roots of conflict-generation. He brainstorms his position by adding that, besides (i) subjective and ego-centric elements, there exist also other elements and reasons of conflict formation like (ii) aggression and counter-aggression, (iii) penetration and counter-penetration, (iv) violence and revenge to violence, etc. As such, (violent) conflict can be prevented or resolved effectively by tackling its formation (the deep rooted structural and proximate causes). Furthermore, Guha points to the fact that, stable peace and stabilization of peace, demand the adoption and use of appropriate and preventive type of policy measures for hindering to and stopping of the occurrence of violent conflict; and that earlier warning systems pave the way for returning to non-conflicting stage from conflicting situation. Reflectively, therefore, he adds that the infrastructure of conflict prevention consists of time, space, circumstances, motivations, aspects and prospects of conflict formation (or again, the causes of conflict) and these very determinants need analytical dealings in the context of Why? When? Where? How? of the conflict situation.

Thus, as periodic conflicts between individual members or different interest groups are inevitable in any collectivity, despite efforts to prevent them, an effective institution (such a state university) organization and nation must have a variety of reliable conflict management and resolution mechanisms. For, conflict resolution implies that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed, and resolved. This implies that the behavior is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile, and the structure of conflict has been changed. (ibid, p. 21).

### **1.3 The Concept of Peace and The Institutional Capacity for Peace.**

The concept of peace has often been taken to mean the absence of war or direct violence as the media has often portrayed. This is by and large the traditional definition which merely

stands for negative peace. The concept of peace is now broadly understood to include many situations that guarantee positive human conditions. According to Galtung's understanding of peace science, violence can also be direct, structural and cultural (Galtung, 1996). Direct violence in Galtung's view is concrete and evident and committed by and on particular people, such as assault, drive-by shooting, torture and war. In such a situation, both the perpetrator and the victim of violence are known. By contrast, he understands structural violence to be indirect, gradual, imperceptible and diffused in society as the way things are done as a matter of whose voice is systematically heard or ignored and who gets particular resources and who goes without. This is mostly seen in terms of oppressive and exploitative socio-economic and political structures in society, often hidden, chronic and institutionalized, such as university policies regarding increased fees that majority of students cannot afford and which could lead to students protesting the 'deplorable situation'. Cultural violence includes all aspects of religion, ideology, art, science, language and cosmology, which justify and legitimize direct and structural violence (ibid, p. 3). In fact, Galtung defines violence as "unnecessary insult of basic needs"(like official repressive response to university students strike actions in Cameroon and other parts of Africa reveal) . All basic needs (survival, well-being, identity and freedom needs) can be violated by both direct and structural violence. Concurrently, the concept of peace as employed in this paper is seen in its most positive form- a state of complete direct, structural and cultural peace. That is, the complete absence of all forms of violence (direct, structural, cultural, and even environmental and psychological). Hence, according to Galtung, peace is characterized by the presence of harmonious social relations and integration of human society; this means that people live and coexist by cohabiting peacefully (ibid) Therefore, positive peace also prevails where everyone has fair and equal access to justice (political, social, economic, environmental, etc.) and an atmosphere of coexistence in security.

Having established the meanings of conflicts and peace as used in this paper, it becomes easier to state that the institutional capacity for peace is the ability of an organisation (such as a university) to develop and use the sum of its human and organisational capital to minimise negative and maximise positive impacts on the conflict dynamics of the environment(s) where it works. Closely related to the institutional capacity for peace is the concept of *infrastructures for peace* (peace infrastructures) which refers to "*all institutions, mechanisms, resources, and skills that create resilience, address root causes of conflict and support the peaceful resolution of conflicts*" (GPPAC, 2020). Human capital in institution such as a university includes: staff and partner skills, knowledge and experience, while organisational capital includes, departments, structures, financial resources, organisational culture and learning.

It this it is perhaps necessary to throw some light on the conflict, peace and security landscape of Cameroon before focusing on universities.

## **2. The Theory of Negotiated Peace and Conflict Mediation**

In addition to the relevant literature on peace and conflict which this article builds on, the analysis of the management of the students' protest is specifically informed by the theories of negotiated peace and conflict mediation. Some of the conflict resolution mechanisms

employed in contemporary conflict resolution are: negotiation which refers to the process whereby the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts without the help of a third party. For example, the University administration and the striking students could look for peaceful means to deal with the underlying and immediate causes of their conflict and resolving it through a mutually satisfying solution. However, if conflict parties can no longer communicate and resolve their own conflict, then there is a need to involve the intervention of a third party, through a process known as mediation. Mediation it is a voluntary process in which the parties retain control over the outcome (pure mediation), although it may include positive and negative inducements (mediation with muscle). Conciliation or facilitation is close in meaning to pure mediation, and refers to intermediary efforts to encourage the parties to move towards negotiations.

The theory of negotiated peace assumes that the end to quarrel that was reached by negotiations without pressure and by consent of all parties involved and all disputed issues without reservations has a greater chance of durability than non-consensus resolution. In other words, the level of consent is decisive for the durability of an agreement; the greater the consent, the more durable is the solution. If these conditions are not fulfilled, then the war may end while the conflict goes on (Guha, 2002 p. 21). What does all this mean in conflict resolution? It means that the solution to a conflict such as university students' strike action should not be imposed but it must be reached jointly through problem-solving mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, dialogue etc.

### **3. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

This paper adopts an exploratory qualitative research design, organized around a critical review of relevant literature and theories and empirically grounded in primary data (involving the use of interviews and observations) collected periodically within a ten (10) year interval (2006 and 2016) and secondary data (from newspaper articles, books and internet reports). Data is analyzed by way of content analysis, thematically and the use of word verbatim.

### **4. Brief overview of Cameroon's Peace and Conflict Landscape and the Need to Reimagine the Role of Universities.**

We live in an increasingly fragile world: many previously "stable" countries and cities have experienced disruption and sudden outages, reversing years of hard-won progress in development (UNDP, 2016). It's practically the same situation in which Cameroon finds itself after decades of peaceful coexistence. Recently, Cameroon has been grappling with a plethora of security threats and a precarious socio-economic situation linked to a high influx of refugees from conflicts in the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region; Boko Haram war activities in the Far North Region of Cameroon, and especially the inception in October 2016 of the current destructive conflict in the Anglophone North-West (NW) and South-West (SW) Regions that started through a peaceful protest of the Anglophone lawyers and teachers against a perceived marginalization of their legal and educational systems that since 2017 degenerated into a deadly armed conflict that also involved the killing and raping of university students. In addition to this, there have been electoral conflicts and violence, inter-communal violence and several university students strike actions in the distant past and more recently, with serious negative human and material consequences. As such, this paper is written at a crucial time in Cameroon's socio-political

history wherein the country's peace, unity and territorial integrity has been seriously threatened by various types of violent conflicts and war activities.

Unfortunately, in the search for peace in Cameroon, higher education institutions have so far not been active. Moreover, many university administrations and academics know and are more comfortable with conflict resolution mechanism based on methods such as the exercise of the authority by the teacher vis-à-vis the students, the use of the rules of school/university, disciplinary hearings, use of other administrative proceedings and even sometimes violent means. Moving from these methods to one that encourages individuals to talk about their interests and needs as well as to work together in a concerted manner in order to find integrated solutions, requires, a major change in paradigm.

In the face of the growing challenges of peace and security in the world in general and in Cameroon in particular, any lasting solution must certainly place education for a culture of peace at the center of the analysis with a focus on strengthening the institutional capacities for peace of higher education key stakeholders. In fact, higher education must regain its central place in peacebuilding, respect for human rights and fundamentals freedoms and the full development of human potential. What is important to note here is the pursuit and maintenance of peace in universities which should then have a positive consequence in the communities and society at large. Hence, in reimagining the future of Higher Education institutions in conflict management and peace, this article arouses the capacity of key stakeholders in Cameroonian Universities to integrate positive peace values into their work and in the non-violent resolution of conflicts before even the occurrence of violence, in order to allow conflicts to have positive consequences at the individual, relational, school/academic, community and society,

##### **5. Causes and Manifestation of Selected Episodes of State University Students' Protests in Cameroon (2005-2016)**

Social protests can have very detrimental human and material consequences (Moeketsi, 2023), since they can turn bloody, lead to death and the destruction of relevant infrastructures and properties, especially when managed destructively. This is what has been observed in many parts of Africa in recent years. Faced with an expanding crisis in state universities, African students have demonstrated a growing activism and militancy. They have been engaged in numerous, strike actions (that have most at times turned violent) with the aim positively changing their study and living conditions and for a more democratic and inclusive university governance. Such youth activism has been observed in Cameroonian state universities in the past and more recently and this section briefly highlights some of these students strike actions within the period 2005-2016, with more emphasis on the experience of the university of Buea (the first out of the only two Anglo-Saxon universities in Cameroon, located in the capital city of the South West Region, Buea)

University students in Cameroon have been very angry and frustrated in last couple of years. In April 2005 their anger erupted when they staged a series of strikes throughout the State Universities, starting with the mother University (University of Yaounde I) and spreading to other state universities with more negative repercussions in the University of Buea . Against

the backdrop of rising costs in state universities, suspicion of impending fee hikes, and deteriorating study and living conditions on and off campus, the students of the University of Yaoundé I, organised under the Cameroon Students' Rights Association (ADDEC) went on strike in April 2005. Given the similar deepening crisis in other state universities, Yaoundé I students' strike action had a quick national ramification as University of Buea, Douala and Dchang quickly entered into the conflict picture.

During the strikes, students reeled a litany of grievances: indifferent university authorities, dilapidated infrastructure, obsolete libraries, no toilets, fee hikes etc. In short, the students complained that they were studying under appalling conditions. All they wanted, they said, were better conditions and an enabling environment under which they could live and study ( *The Post News Paper No. 0663 Monday May 3, 2005*). More specifically, students of the University of Buea, articulated a long list of demands which included among others the scrapping of University registration fees of 50, 000FCFA in all six state universities then, the provision of toilet facilities; the repeal of the faculty association fees and the better provision of student services at the university. As such, they boycotted lectures and decide not to cooperate with the University administration until their grievances are resolved. Not surprisingly, they were met with brutal confrontation from the forces of law and order. As such, to counter the strikes, government sent out armed troops. To be sure, that was necessary to prevent the seething students from destroying property. The troops came with water cannons and tear gas and guns. Then, they went berserk. They brutalized, molested and arrested some students. Also –tragically, they shot and killed two armless students in the University of Buea and one other person whom some sources said was a Buea town-base taxi driver. One of the students was shot in the head and the other hit in the chest. Both died instantly. Independent newspapers however said a third, female student had died of wounds sustained during the clash with police and paramilitary gendarmes. In a statement read on state-run radio, Higher Education Minister Jacques Fame Ndongo appealed for calm and said President Paul Biya "has requested a judicial enquiry to establish the exact cause of the deaths." (the New Humanitarian, 2005). As the strike was prolonged, the demands of Buea university students' strike expanded to include the administration of every course during re-sit examinations, the unconditional release of arrested students, the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor etc.

In addition, another crisis, a strike action of the Buea University students ensued in November 2006 wherein, the students boycotted classes and besieged the campus. In fact, on November 27, in protest of a list that the Minister of Higher Education reportedly imposed on a list of candidates for the newly created Medical School in the University of Buea; the University authorities again in collaboration with the Government were unable to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. As usual, the protesting students were met with police brutally, leaving two students dead and several wounded, on November 29, 2006. According to local press, both students were shot by state security forces in the face around the university junction. In reaction, the then Vice Chancellor of the University, Prof. Cornelius Lambi, in a statement to the students had admitted that he had made a monumental error he said he committed by signing the list of successful students after they conducted the exams. In his

words, "This is our first time of organising an examination that directly recruits trainees into public service. I want to apologise that I caused the problem because I signed a list that the Minister was supposed to endorse," (Sumelong, 2006)

According to the Vice Chancellor, no extra list was imposed but that the Minister of Higher education had increased the number of students to be admitted into the orals from an original list of 127 to 153, to give more students a chance (ibid). The text that created the Department of Medicine did not state if the Minister has to sign the list of successful candidates before the orals and so many supposed that the VC was right to sign the list, although he was taking the blame. The text, however, makes it clear that the Minister signs and endorses the final list of successful candidates after the orals. According to local newspapers, many students argued that the VC feared to say the truth and that the university sources confirmed that an additional list had been sent from the capital Yaoundé and which displeased University of Buea authorities. It was revealed that the VC's statements angered the students who had wanted him to denounce the new list (which they considered fraudulent and corrupt) and maintain the original one he signed. One of the student representatives, who spoke anonymously, told *The Post* newspaper that they could not accept fraud in the university and said their action is in solidarity with their brothers who would be denied a place to study medicine and given to some undeserving people, whom they are sure did not write the exam. Students also questioned why the Registrar, who had launched an aggressive fight against corruption and fraud in the university, suddenly kept sealed lips (ibid).

In addition, the students, besides the supposedly imposed list, had, in a memorandum, denounced the hike in fee of postgraduate programmes, payment of FCFA 1000 for collection of transcripts, poor quality food at the restaurant among others. Addressing the issues, the VC remarked that the money paid to collect transcripts would be maintained. He said the university could not step-down fees for postgraduate programmes since the institution lacks funds to run the programmes.

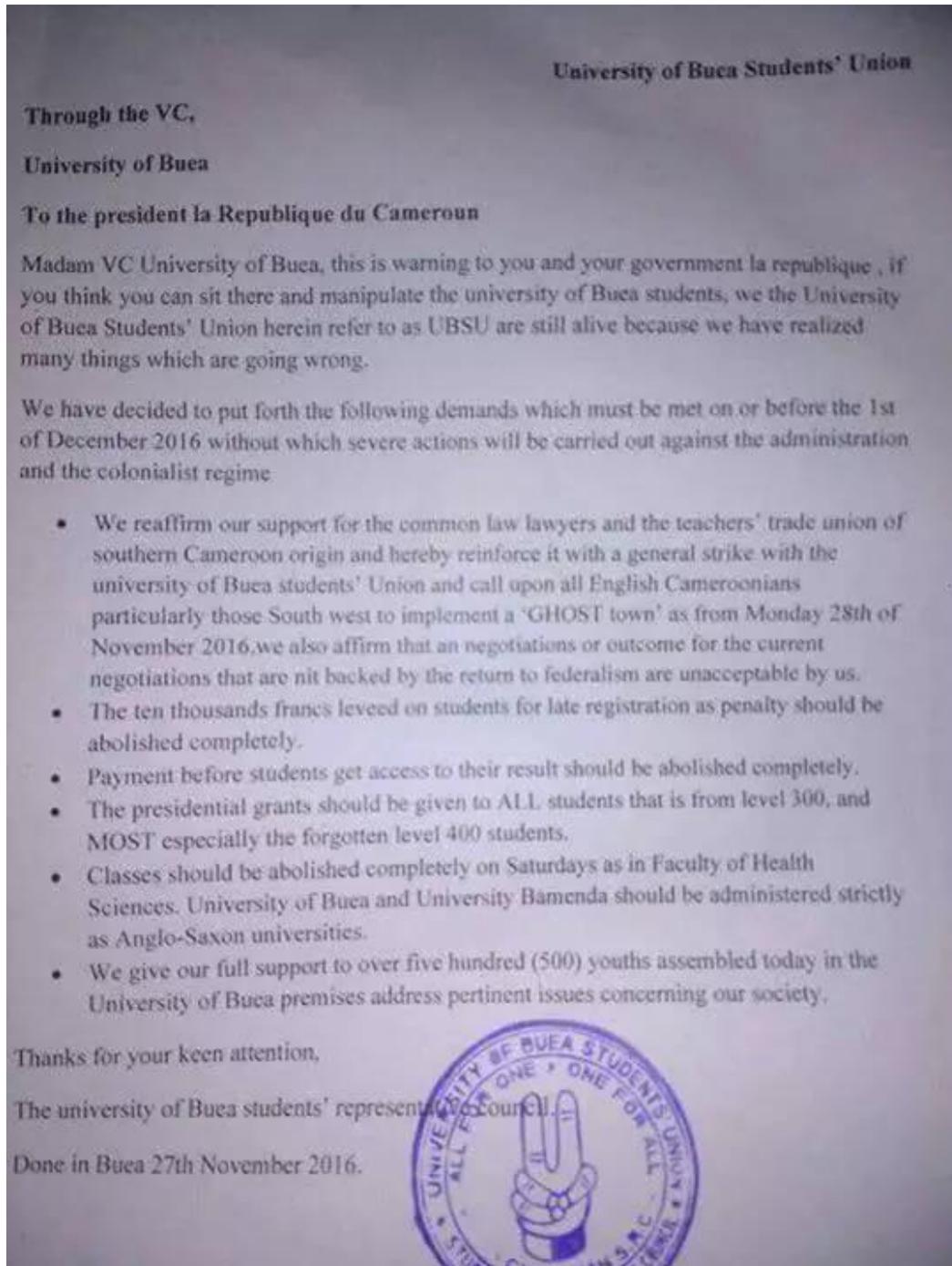
Another incident that led to higher education under attack in the University of Buea, is linked to the eruption of the bloody armed conflict that has been going on now for close to eight (8) years in the English-Speaking NW and SW Regions of Cameroon. According to information from Education Under Attack 2018-Cameroon, published by the Global Coalition to Protect Education, (11 May 2008), another cause of the violence that affected education in Cameroon stemmed from internal tensions between Cameroon's French-speaking majority and its English-speaking minority. In October 2016, lawyers from the English-speaking northwest and southwest regions went on strike in response to the perceived marginalization of the Anglophone minority, including the lack of English-language legal resources (*Amnesty International Report 2016/17*, p. 107). Journalists, students, teachers, and others in the Anglophone areas expanded the scope of the protests to include the imposition of French-language education. National security forces responded violently, killing at least four people during a crackdown in December 2016 (ibid). This violence led to more than a year of general strikes and school closures (including University of Buea and Bamenda) by Anglophone school authorities as well as boycotts of schools still operating in other regions. (International

Crisis Group, 2017, p. 20) In a nutshell, attacks on higher education occurred in the context of the anti-government protests in Anglophone regions that started in October 2016. Government efforts to repress this opposition resulted in at least three reported incidents of violence committed against university students in late 2016, and one arrest of a university professor in early 2017. According to reports from International Crisis Group, 2017, these incidents included the following:

- *Scholars at Risk and international media indicated in late November 2016 that state security forces reportedly attacked students participating in a peaceful protest at the University of Buea in Southwest region. An unknown number of students were detained.*
- *Local media reported that students at the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda were raped, tortured, and pulled from their dormitories before being arraigned in court for supposedly protesting on an unspecified date in December 2016.*
- *On January 17, 2017, security forces arrested Dr. Fontem A. Neba, a professor at the University of Buea, in connection with a strike that began the day before. Dr. Neba was placed in a detention cell and was reportedly subject to inhumane treatment while in detention, which lasted until at least February 2017.*
- *In the early morning of October 1, 2017, government security forces raided the hostels at the University of Bamenda in Northwest region, reportedly harming students, lecturers, and their families, according to University World News.*

Below is a list of all the students demand made in later to the president.

Figure 1: The list of demands drawn up by students in Buea



(Source: France24 : <https://observers.france24.com/en/20161201-students-cameroon-beaten-humiliated-protesting>)

Officials subsequently announced that they had responded to the protesters core demand and abolished the 10,000 francs CFA penalty fee for late tuition payments. However, an official announcement was yet to be made regarding the students' other demands, who said they will

keep demonstrating until their grievances are addressed.

In this paper, while the focus is on the general strikes of the State Universities in Cameroon, the major analytical attention is on the one-month long University of Buea Students strike and socio-political crisis (April -May 2005) which is perhaps more compelling as it was quickly translated into the major historical ethno-regional antagonism between Anglophone Northwesterners and Southwesterners. From all intents and purposes, the ambition is not to cover the whole scenario of the crisis dynamics since this paper is unable to accommodate it. Thus, only the most remarkable points which are necessary for contextual analysis of the conflict and object of this paper shall be handled. That is the next focus of the paper.

## **6. Analysis of Causes and Dynamics of the Month-Long Buea University Students' Protest ( April 27 to May 27, 2005): a retrospective analysis**

The 2005 Buea University students' protest, was led by the self-proclaimed University of Buea Students' Union (UBSU). But one might well ask, what were the grievances of the University of Buea students? In a 17-point memorandum to the Minister of Higher Education, the students' grievances included among others: the reversal of the signing of an undertaking, the replacement of the Students' Union and the abolition of the 50.000CFA school fee. Other demands were that there should be re-sit exam for all courses, the students were also calling for all their fellow students who were arrested and detained to be released, that gendarmes and police forces must be asked to leave the campus immediately. The other demands mentioned in the memorandum related to scholarships, toilets, laboratories, food, condition of teaching staff, the obtention of transcripts free of charge etc. That this demand be met before classes can resume (*The Eden News Paper No. 013 May 18, 2005, p. 2*).

As earlier said, the strike action subsequently turned violent and bloody. Police violence led to the killing of two University students: Gilbert Nforlem, (a master's degree Zoology student) and Aloysius Abuam, (a student from the Faculty of Education). Police shot Nforlem in his chest while Abuam was shot in his head from behind, on Thursday, April 28, (*The Post News Paper No. 0663 Monday May 3, 2005, p. 3*). The students' strike tended into an unfolding drama as the Buea populace also became soaked into the rioting and violent confrontation between the striking students and the forces of law and order. In fact, each day that passed built up scenes that fit into a tragic comedy. A second confrontation took place on May 5 during the removal of the corpse from the mortuary of one of the killed students-Gilbert Mforlem.

The *Eden Newspaper* reported that because the students were denied access to the University Junction, the place where they normally held their deliberations, they decided to gather outside the University Street on Tuesday, May 24, 2005, to listen to fiery talk from their new leader. Hell broke loose when South West Governor Thomas Ejake Mbonda led an escort of police and gendarme officers to disperse the students who were holding their "Street parliament," but the students resisted. Police shot tear gas; students fired back with stones. This apparent confusion led to the killing of another person whom some sources reported that he was a Buea town-base taxi driver while some other sources especially from the students reported that the young man was a University student. The violent clash between the striking students and the forces of law and order also left scores of students seriously injured, at least

five policemen and three gendarme officers were also wounded. As the street battle continued another day in Buea, a female gendarme officer was reportedly abducted by the students and later released when her captors discovered she was pregnant. Before her release, she was seriously tormented. Besides that, at least three cars, two of them police vans were destroyed and reduced to carcasses. Two police guns, AA7831 were destroyed while the gendarmes lost grenades (*The Eden News Paper No.014 May 25, 2005*). Before this chaotic situation, the then Vice Chancellor of the University of Buea Dr. Dorothy L. Njeuma, had given the students an ultimatum, ordering them to resume classes as from Monday, May 23 or face dismissals. As the Vice Chancellor continued to hold firm not to meet the students out of campus and punish those who absent from classes, the students seemed more and more determined in their action to the extent that they started internationalizing their action. As this researcher visited the University campus later that evening in company of the editor in chief of the *Post Newspaper* they were reliably informed that the students had constituted and dispatched a four man delegation to the capital Yaoundé to pose their grievances to various international bodies such as UNESCO, Amnesty International, British and Canadian High Commissions, the African Union, and the Commonwealth. The delegation was also expected to meet the Minister of Higher Education and the *Aboueme-a-Tchoyi Commission* (President Paul Biya's delegation to investigate into issues afflicting State Universities in Cameroon).

This Commission failed in their three-day mission in the University of Buea as the students insisted that they could not hold any talks with the delegation without first holding an open dialogue out of campus with their Vice Chancellor. The students were only busy shouting: "No VC, No Dialogue". In fact, the students held placards with inscriptions; "no violence", "Dialogue before classes", "Repent and dialogue with students and others", etc. According to the students, the reason for assembling outside was in defiance of any dialogue on campus. (*The Eden News Paper No. 013 May 18, 2005*).

Surprisingly enough, the students strike action attracted interpretations from different quarters. South-westerners persistently interpreted the strike as being orchestrated and masterminded by the settlers (more precisely, North-westerners) transforming the whole situation into some kind of "polarized ideological space." For instance, the *Heron Newspaper* interpreted the communiqué issued by the South-West Elites Association (SWELA) during the peak of the strike actions as apportioning blames to what it referred to as 'North-Westerners' (*The Heron Newspaper No. 0094, Wednesday May 18-24, 2005, p.2.*). Perhaps, it is interesting to have a flair of SWELA's communiqué during their annual assembly in Mudemba, Ndian division in the South West Province as captured by the *Eden Newspaper*:

...SWELA deeply mourns the loss of lives of students at the University of Buea [...] Regrettably, SWELA is well aware that persons and groups that hate the South-West Province and its people have infiltrated and are manipulating the students to senselessly destroy the University, public and private property. In the past, such persons destroyed the Women's House and the defunct Produce Marketing Board in Kumba, South-West Province[...] SWELA resolved and Warned: "The people of the South West Province will no longer Stand idly by to allow public property in the Province damaged or their sons and daughters targeted for destruction by unpatriotic persons. Enough is enough (ibid:9).

Rightly or wrongly, this demonstration against "strangers" in the South-West Province (now, region) was later on implicitly echoed by the then Vice Chancellor of the said University, Dr.

Dorothy L. Njeuma, a born and bred native of Buea, South-west regional capital. In a speech which she presented during the visit of Higher Education Minister, (Prof. Jacques Fame Ndong) to the University on May 27, 2005, she accused a certain group of people of actually masterminding the University of Buea crisis. This same day marked the end of the deadlock when higher Education Minister had no other option but to sign a peace pact with the striking students. The Vice Chancellor reported that the riot of students was instigated by some members of the teaching staff of the University of Buea who, all along demonstrated an attitude of lawlessness. She said instead of teaching the students what is on the programme, they only talk about their deans, the vice-chancellor, the President of the Republic and the regime and that when she was out of the country, these same teachers instigated students into violent riot. She even went ahead to demonize such persons. In her words,

*“.... There are some members of staff who are prepared to kill because they want posts. Such persons must know that the appointment to a position of responsibility is not a right. Appointments are deserved; they cannot be obtained by force or through intimidation”<sup>1</sup>*

However, what was most remarkable during and after the strike action was the manner in which the simple and peaceful student protest was transformed into a “stranger element” and an “enemy other” of in-group vs out-group (us vs them) phenomenon. What outcome then should be expected during conflict management and/ resolution when a peaceful student protest due to real interests, objective grievances is projected into some kind of identity politics?. The peaceful students protest went from a conflict of interests to a conflict of ideology and dehumanization.

## **7 Analysis of Conflict Actors.**

The focus of this section is to critically analyze the 2005 Buea University Crisis with a focus on the role of the key actors. By taking on this analytical endeavor, the aim is to better understand what went wrong with the management and potential resolution of the conflict and therefore search for creative approaches to a collective problem solving when such a situation occurs or threatens to emerge again in the future since this paper attempts reimagining the future of Higher Education in peace and conflict management processes. .

### **7.1 The Role the University Authorities/Administration.**

As already known, as long as human interaction is concerned, conflict is inevitable, it is an integral aspect of social life, existing at all levels of society, individual, group, institutions, national and international relations. In this perspective, conflict in the strict sense of the term is not a real problem, what is problematic about conflict is its exposure into violence and this escalation of conflict may only be attributed to the inability or failure to accommodate and resolve contradictions in society through arrangements and procedures that eliminate their negative effects and maximize their positive ones. The most potent arrangement and procedure resorted to in this paper is that of (violent) conflict prevention wherein Guha (2002) argued that for understanding and determining the functional mechanism of conflict

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<sup>1</sup> A full text of Njeuma’s Speech is provided by the Post News Paper No. 0673, Monday June 6, 2005 p. 11

prevention, one should understand deeply the roots of conflict generation. Brainstorming his ideas, he added that the infrastructure of conflict prevention consists of time, space, circumstances, motivations, aspects and prospects of conflict formation wherein we need to analytically deal with issues of “Why” and “How” which represent the circumstantial and motivational determinants and dimensions of conflict formation. “When” and “Where” wherein, “When” stands for the time determinant and dimensions of the roots-formation of conflict and “Where” deals with the space determinant and dimension of the conflict development and conflict situation. Thankfully, in connection to conflict formation, Galtung’s (1996) influential model that sees conflict in the form of a triangle brings to light the argument that there is a manifest and a latent side to conflict, that the latent side is identified with “attitude” and “contradiction” whereas the manifest side is identified with “behavior”. In which case, in a conflict situation, there is somewhat a contradiction and that this contradiction may be experienced as frustration where a goal is being blocked by something, leading to aggressiveness as an attitude and aggression as behavior. Now coming back to the genesis of the strike action it can be depicted that the Buea University striking students had accumulated grievances and were just waiting for the slightest opportunity to get ignited. *The Eden News Paper* vividly puts the whole scenario as follows:

Obviously inspired by the University of Yaounde I Strike, as early as 7 am on Wednesday April 27, 2005, a group of students bombed into various lecture halls beginning from the U-Block Complex and forced all lecturers to terminate on-going lessons and increasing in number as they moved along. But the University of Buea had their own grievances indicated in the various placards they carried along-No French 101, No English 102, we need all courses to feature in the re-sit exams, we want Hotel VIDALU out of campus, we need a student union etc. Nonetheless, the projected peaceful demonstration turned into violence as the Police intervened. The demonstrations reached the apex Thursday 28, the police started firing tear gas, grenades and some bullets towards students who in turned retaliated by throwing stones on them.( *The Eden News Paper* No.011 May 3, 2005, p.4.)

Now, recognizing that in an institution of higher learning like a university, regardless of the best intentions of all involved, conflict is inevitable, and these could range from interpersonal conflict between the student and the advisor/lecturer, dispute about evaluation of progress, qualifying or oral examination, disruptive, abusive or destructive behavior on the part of the advisor/lecturer as well as on the part of the student. Overall, conflict can arise due to poor study and work conditions. The question now is: does the University of Buea have an appropriate conflict prevention and management mechanism that could enable the institution to anticipate the outburst of conflict? Whatever the answer, the fact remains that if the University had an avenue for the anticipation of conflict through say early warning and response (intervention) techniques including facilitated individual or group meetings, conciliation meetings, informal fact-finding or mediation, the students contradictions and attitudes would have been addressed at an early stage before they had to resort to conflict behavior.

Okay, now that the University administration lacks appropriate and preventive type of policy measures for hindering and stopping of the occurrence of tensions and violent conflict, the conflict had no other option but to be manifested. The crucial question that arises and which one cannot take lightly is that, now that the conflict behavior took the center stage, what strategy did the University authorities/administration employ to reduce the destructive aspect of the behavior and hence to render it conciliatory, constructive and friendly? It was

seen somewhere along the discussion that instead of employing a dialogical and soft method to win the minds of the students, the VC, Dr. Dorothy L. Njeuma instead resorted to the use of force by issuing a communiqué, giving the students an ultimatum to resume classes at a set date or face dismissal. She categorically refused to dialogue with the striking students despite their insistence on dialoguing with her out of campus. She chose to lean on a political agenda accusing some members of the staff who hate the Biya regime for actually instigating the students to go on rampage and masterminding the strike. Furthermore, the fact that she abolished the Student Union meant that she viewed herself as a “god-like leader” meanwhile experience over the years have shown that negotiations between duly recognized students’ bodies and universities have always been exhaustive. Well-founded demands have always been given recognition. However, at this level of the analysis the most important conclusion that can be arrived at is that the lack of foresight, early intervention and a people-oriented leadership that put the “people first” and seeing peace as arising from below were at the ‘heart’ of the conflict escalation. Clearly, the University Administration proved its incapacity to tackle the “why” and “how” of the conflict formation and to prevent its negative dynamics.

## **7.2 The Role of Public Authorities and High-Level Government Officials.**

After the second confrontation between the striking students and the forces of law and order on May 5, 2005, the atmosphere was relatively peaceful though this was an uneasy calm. The students maintained their strike action nonviolently until when heavily armed troops led by South-West Governor Thomas Ejake Mbonda tried to disperse them violently on May 24, 2005. This action by the governor could only lead to the deepening of the crisis as on that day one other person was shot dead, several others wounded, many more students arrested, the police and gendarmes themselves were not spared, police vans and guns were burnt to “dust”. This is because the frustrated students took more courage and got aggressive. They engaged in a physical combat with the forces of law and order. Reflecting back to Guha’s ideas on conflicts generation wherein, he brings to light the fact that besides subjective and ego-centric elements, there exist also other elements and reasons of conflict generation like aggression and counter aggression, penetration and counter-penetration, violence and revenge to violence. Surely when the governor resorted to the use of force instead of telling his police and gendarmes to put down arms and then call on the angry students, dialogue with them like a father he did not have in mind that violence breeds violence. A fatherly approach to dialogue would have been a powerful weapon.

Talking about the action of the police, it is doubtful whether they had undergone any prior training relating to peacekeeping. According to Galtung (1996) peacekeeping aims at controlling the actors that they at least stop destroying things, others and themselves. The action of the Cameroonian forces of law and order runs counter to the whole idea of peacekeeping. Paradoxically, therefore, by trying to crush the strike action, they acted as strike promoters as the heavily armed troops only help to get the destructive side of the conflict as they failed to perform their function as peacekeepers and instead resorted to torture, looting and raping.

In Gandhi’s philosophy of “satyagraha”, he advocates that cleaving to nonviolence in group social conflict situations may undercut the ability of the opponent to employ overly harsh measures of oppression and retaliation. Now the question is, is Gandhi’s doctrine

tenable in a society like Cameroon where there appears to be actually no “freedom of speech”, no emphasis on human security, no place for peaceful street demonstration? However, Gandhi warned that if the opponents employ strategies that appear to be disproportionately harsh, they run the risk of alienating not only neutrals but also eventually supporters and allies. And the analysis on the case of the University of Buea has proven Gandhi to be absolutely true. See the arrest and torture of the pregnant gendarme woman, see the several police and gendarmes wounded, and see the burning of the police vans and destruction of guns and grenades etc. The Cameroonian forces of law and order, high level government officials-governors, ministers, police commanders etc seemed like they have never heard of preventive diplomacy or “peace by peaceful means” and this even seems laughable and more worrisome

No doubt, President Paul Biya set up a high-level commission to investigate the root causes of the strikes in State universities in Cameroon. However, this commission (the three-man delegation led by former minister, David Abouem a Tchoyi on May 17, 2005) as already noted, was rejected by the protesting students. Also, here the question one needs to ask is at what stage of the strike dynamics did the commission come to intervene? Here emphasis is on the “when” which concerns the time determinant of the dimension of the roots-formation (root causes) of the conflict. The commission arrived at about the third week of the strike action when the conflict situation had already escalated and developed several and firmer roots. The students faced with the loss of their comrades were now more determined than ever before to pursue their interest and win their case. Consequently, all the soft words that the commission was struggling to use seemed to fall into deaf ears. The time to apply the theory of *negotiated peace* was almost over as the words of one of the protest leaders reveal:

*“We would intensify the strike until the government resolves all our grievances. All we have as arms are the stones you see around. We are unarmed, but the police were so brutal. They beat up even girls. We are not losing the battle, we are winning (The Post Newspaper No. 0673, Monday June 6, 2005 p. 11.* Thus, the presidential delegation failed in their role as “third party” mediator as no space could be created for any negotiation.

Now the next person to come in was the Minister of Higher Education himself on May 28, 2005 after one month of the strike and as mentioned earlier, this day marked the end of the strike action as the minister signed a peace agreement with the aggrieved students. But the doubtful question here is that, is the settlement of a dispute equivalent to resolving a conflict? In the agreement, the minister promised the students immediate provision of all their demands. The point here is that one of the main conflict actors, the University administration or to put it squarely, the Vice chancellor was left out. For, the agreement was only between the striking students and the minister. From the look of things, it even appeared as if the minister was being forced to sign the agreement or else, the strike continues. Not surprisingly, therefore, few days later, rumors began to probe in that the students still want to go on strike as the vice chancellor insisted that she is not the one who signed the agreement after the Minister had left. The minister also seemed to lose sight of the fact that an agreement has little value if it is not accepted by all conflict parties and cannot be properly implemented and sustained. Hence, relating to the role played by the government, it is evident that like the university authorities/administration, there is also the yearning for the capacity for peace and good governance in Cameroon in particular and Africa at large. Cameroon is faced with a government that hardly intervenes proactively or again preventively but simply reacts to

situations and most at times when it is too late, the lack of preventive diplomatic capacity also affects the peace and conflict management capacities of higher education institutions

### **7.3 The Part Played by the Protesting Students.**

Again, with reference to Gandhi's doctrine, he warned that in a social Satyagraha, whether against the government, a group or an individual, before taking any action, an individual must convince themselves of the truthfulness of the cause ( see Choudhurie, 2006). That they must never act as a mere functionary, but always as an autonomous, fully responsible person (ibid) Realizing the danger of indiscipline in tense situation of mass action, however, the Gandhi held that once the decision has been made, by an individual to embark upon a course of action along with others, the orders of the leader must be cheerfully obeyed. The question that pops up is, if the students were actually convinced about the truthfulness of their cause, was their strike action properly planned and executed? The contention here is that, the fact that there was no legally recognized students' body, it aggravated the crisis. This is because, even if the authorities had so desired, there would have been "no responsible" leader to talk to. Admittedly, this was not the fault of the students but the University authorities who muffled the functioning of a student body. But then, the students had a self-proclaimed University of Buea Students Union (UBSU) with several leaders. Hence, the students on their part lacked a strong leadership which no doubt made their protest difficult to attain their demands resulting in the killing of their mates by the police. They actually lacked the ability to define areas where they were going to protect in their own interest. As such, by losing their mates, the situation degenerated into a total battle. Moreover, the students failed to understand that no matter how aggrieved they were, they lost sight of the fact that a university is a place of cultured and responsible people. Hence, the destructions they put forward were more or less, disproportionate to the reasons that motivated them to engage in a strike action. Confirmatively, there was some bad will on the part of the students. Engaging in a nonviolent protest is of course the "power of the powerless" (according to the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence), but it seems that the students were ignorant of the Gandhian teaching that non-violence is the positive social functional process for generating a conduct of understandability and peacefulness, stressing that nonviolence is to be understood as non-injury to self, to neighbor, to society, to locality and to globe. In any case, violence breeds violence.

### **7.4 The Part Played by the Elites of the Region: From a sit-down strike to a war of De-humanization and Annihilation.**

Taking the analysis further, it becomes undeniably true that the students strike coincided with greater intolerance, fear, hostility and distrust by the host population. For as illustrated previously, in search of the causes of the strike, the South-West Elites Association ( SWELA) a pressure group which was born with political liberalization to promote the socio-economic development of the South-West Region, apportioned blames on the North-westerners for actually orchestrating the strike. The accusation did not only end with the strike situation but led to the resurrection of past animosities between the two groups of peoples, the communiqué explicitly "pointed fingers of blame" to the "stranger" population for the major

destructions that have been taking place within the South-West and that they could no longer stand indolently watching such destructions from “aggressive immigrants.” More critically, what is one to make of such a communiqué? Without searching it is clear that detractors hiding under the umbrella of SWELA had the aim to ignite ill-will and to continuously polarize the “behavioral space” with “xenophobic dust” so as to further institutionalize the North-West/South-West dichotomy. The question that may puzzle one here is that when leaders of SWELA were issuing this communiqué what did they have in the back of their minds? Was this ethnic undertone used for political end or it is that they behaved in such a violent and distorted way for the purpose of actually protecting the collective identity of the South-West people vis-à-vis their North-West counterparts? These questions, probably, only the elites themselves can provide an answer. As earlier noted, the Vice Chancellor herself, a born and bred native of the South-West, actually implicitly demonized the “settler population.” The South-West students themselves fell into the trap of “like leaders like followers.” They no longer acted unanimously with their North-Western counterparts. This researcher met with a group of students from the South-West who lamented that these “Cam-no-goes” (a kind of ethno-regional stereotype which the host population, South-Westerners use to remind the settler population, North-Westerners of their “stranger-hood”) are really bent in disrupting the smooth functioning of our University but they cannot not go untouched”. From here, it can be seen that because of the politization of ethnicity and negative **parental indoctrination**, in an educational environment, the striking students became confrontational with each other. Thus, the divided students tended to act as a “buffer” (to use George Nwane’s terminology) to the escalating tension that would have ensued were it just a “one-horse race” (that is, if they were united). With such a very poor knowledge of conflict formation, dynamics, prevention, management and resolution, what could we expect? There was every reason for the students strike to resemble a protracted social conflict. Azar for one, used the term protracted social conflict “to suggest the type of ongoing and seemingly irresolvable conflict” (Azar, in Burton and Dukes, 1990). With all this apparent incapacity for peace, conflict sensitivity and constructive conflict management, what can be done.

## **8. Lessons Learned and Policy Directions: a prospective analysis**

What has so far become abundantly clear in this intellectual endeavor is the fact that unlike in the western world, where conflicts can be seen as having just a single cause for example religiously oriented, socially inclined, politically etc, Africa presents a totally different situation. Evidently, from the Cameroon experience, it is easy to argue that in Africa, the causes of conflicts are multifaceted and difficult to determine. The analysis in this paper has clearly illustrated how an objective student strike, caused by inappropriate social conditions and university norms (conflict of interest), tended to be transformed into a variety of causes. The students’ dissatisfaction with their study condition and environment as the main cause of the strike tended to be coupled with political claims and ethnic consideration during and after the dynamics of the strike situation. In this regard, it is obvious that the procedures for peaceful conflict resolution could not be expected to be as clear and generally accepted as in the Euro-American and other societies wherein a conflict can be viewed as having a unidirectional origin. All the conflict parties showed defiance and/or inability in applying all the alternative approaches to preventing, managing and resolving the conflicts. A

high rank university authority such as the then Vice Chancellor Dorothy L. Njeuma, came under fire for sparking the violent turn, that the students' strike took, with her "display of arrogance and the use of intimidation tactics" which the students simply ignored. She showed her incapacity of tackling the deep-rooted sources of the conflict formation. Also, the recurrent Buea University strike actions offer an opportunity for the public administration in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa to learn that "problems are better nipped in the bud before they rear their ugly heads". In the case of the 2005 students strike, the president of the republic dispatched a mediation team only when he saw that it was necessary, and by that time, the conflict had developed and reached the threshold of irreversibility. The Minister of Higher Education was even almost rendered ridiculous as he appeared somewhat obliged to sign the peace agreement with the students which ended the dispute without actually resolving and transforming the conflict situation into a more peaceful outcome between the striking students and the University administration. Perhaps the local administration got to learn the most important lesson that "aggression begets aggression". The person to actually take note of this is the South West Governor, Thomas Ejake Mboda. The point is that an administrative authority such as a Governor in Cameroon, is the direct representative of the Head of State in his area of command (the region) and just like the Head of State, he has command over the forces of law and order. This is the main reason why "a finger of blame" could be point at the Governor for the gunning down of students and the destructions that followed. The crisis also exposed the role of the Cameroonian police for privatizing a conflict situation by the way they looted and raped students. On-lookers and students alike testified that there was looting by the police in students' residential areas. The police, they said used the opportunity to break into students' rooms, brutalized, stole and confiscated their mobile phones and in some cases, even raped the female ones. Even if the police wanted to capitalize on self-defense, the fact that one of the students killed was shot from behind in the back of his heard means that he was running away and not attacking his killer.

Moreover, this paper has also highlighted some of the critical factors that have served as impetus to student strikes in Cameroon including the negative influence of politics and authoritarianism in African university administration. In fact, if African countries such as Cameroon (and other countries undergoing similar socio-political experiences) are to claim the working of democracy and peace values, a simple test to pass is the provision of a civic culture whereby peaceful civic demonstrations and protests can be carried out without brutal confrontation from police forces. As such, the most important message that African governments and university authorities can draw from the analysis in this paper is that conflicts have causes and effects that can be anticipated, managed and avoided. In which case, any country or Higher Education Institution without effective mechanisms for crisis and violent conflict prevention and management, is vulnerable and exposed to important losses and dysfunctions. Hence, this paper supports the hypothesis that reimagining the future of higher education in Africa cannot go without the cultivation of a culture of peace through identifying, building and enhancing the institutional capacity needs for peace and conflict management through peace infrastructures and inclusionary democratic governance in African universities and societies.

Moreover, considering the fact that a culture of peace can only rest upon a nonviolent foundation, coupled with the notion that education is the key to a more peaceful and prosperous future for all countries and especially important in areas of state fragility, conflict

or extreme poverty like most of Africa, a further argument is that the nonviolent foundation on which the peace culture is to rest, must begin within African Higher Education Institutions.

In addition, for peace and non-violence to prevail, African governments need to foster a culture of peace through education by revising the educational curricula to promote qualitative values, attitudes and behaviors of a culture of peace including peaceful conflict resolution, dialogue, consensus building and active non-violence. Furthermore, it has been depicted in the analysis of the students strike in Cameroon that one of the deep-rooted causes is that of institutional violence through potential hikes in tuition fees and other university expenditures and precarious teaching and learning conditions of staff and students. Hence, cultivating a culture of peace through identifying, building and enhancing the institutional capacity needs for peace and conflict management through local peace infrastructures should also be geared to promoting the sustainable economic and social development of higher education institutions.

More critically, African higher education institutions must take appropriate measures through research, teaching and learning that promote a peace education pedagogy in universities and identifying policy gaps on conflict and peacebuilding that need to be addressed by higher education stakeholders in collaboration with the wider society and taking measures to eliminate and denounce violence, whatever the form it may take, explicit or implicit, in class, in the premises of the university and the community at large.

Finally, in this project of building a culture of peace and nonviolence in higher education institutions, Africa's international development partners, including the IMF, World Bank, the UN system etc are expected to work collaboratively with African Governments and institutions of higher learning to institute development projects that aim at assisting University systems in Africa in building and strengthening their capacities for peace, conflict sensitivity and the management of conflicts in positive ways.

## **Conclusion.**

In conclusion, it could be argued that if a simple and peaceful student protest from state universities in African countries such as the case of the University of Buea in Cameroon in 2005 (as well as 2016, linked to the Anglophone crisis) could degenerate into a “polarized ideological space” with the end result being a conflict of de-humanization and annihilation then indeed, there is need to reimagine or again to rethink the future of higher education institutions in Africa in peace and conflict management processes in universities in particular and the society at large. It could also be argued that though most of the problems plaguing African higher education institutions are traceable to the lack of adequate resources, good university facilities etc. poor leadership style, lack of capacities for peace, conflict sensitivity and constructive conflict management of key university authorities, administration, students, and lecturers constitutes the bulk of the problem and is therefore a call for concern for higher education stakeholders in Africa. Hence, for higher education institutions to change the course of conflict events so as to produce a better and brighter future for African Universities in particular and the African continent as at large, there is need for a paradigm shift from a culture of building: “peace by violence” means to building “peace by peaceful (non-violent)” means through inclusionary democratic governance practices in African universities in

particular and society at large. In this light, building capacities for peace and maintaining appropriate mechanisms or institutions devoted to continuous prevention and management of violent conflict and crisis situations are of paramount importance for the future of higher education institutions in Africa and for the sustainable peace and development of the Africa “WE WANT” by the AU Agenda 2063.

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