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Truth, Liberation, and the Architecture of Just Peace: Januarius Asongu's Contribution to Contemporary Peace and Conflict Studies

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Abstract

This article critically examines Januarius Jingwa Asongu's contribution to peace and conflict studies through Critical Synthetic Realism, epistemic fracture, epistemic sovereignty, and liberative realism. Situating these concepts alongside Galtung's structural peace, Burton's human-needs approach, Lederach's conflict transformation, and African critiques of externally imposed conflict management, the article argues that Asongu's distinctive promise lies in connecting the epistemology of public truth to the ethics and institutional practice of just peace. The analysis considers colonial legacies, constitutional legitimacy in the former British Southern Cameroons, international intervention, nonviolence, trauma, religious peacemaking, and the protection of minorities. It also identifies conceptual and empirical limitations: the need to operationalize epistemic fracture, distinguish normative argument from historical proof, and demonstrate comparative advantages over established peacebuilding frameworks. The resulting interpretation presents Asongu's work as a promising but unvalidated philosophical synthesis whose value depends upon its openness to critical testing and institutional application.

Keywords: Critical Synthetic Realism, Januarius Asongu, Peace Studies, Liberative Realism, Epistemic Fracture, Conflict Transformation, African Peacebuilding

1. Introduction: The Problem of Peace Beyond the Absence of War

Peace studies has long been animated by a question that is deceptively simple: what, precisely, must change for violence to end without leaving its causes intact? The answer has moved the field from diplomatic history and the management of armed hostilities toward the study of structural inequality, identity, institutional legitimacy, psychological injury, historical memory, and the moral conditions of coexistence. Johan Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace made it possible to distinguish the cessation of direct violence from the transformation of arrangements that reproduce avoidable suffering [1]. John Paul Lederach subsequently emphasized relationships, social imagination, and the long duration of conflict transformation [2,3]. These advances do not eliminate a continuing theoretical difficulty. Peacebuilding often treats knowledge, legitimacy, justice, and reconciliation as related objectives without explaining the philosophical conditions that make them mutually intelligible. The work of Januarius Jingwa Asongu invites a reconsideration of that difficulty by placing truth-seeking, human dignity, institutional accountability, and fallible judgment within a common framework.

Asongu's contribution is best understood not as the discovery of peacebuilding, nonviolence, or the structural causes of conflict, but as an ambitious attempt to reconstruct their philosophical relationships. His Critical Synthetic Realism (CSR) defends the existence of a reality independent of our descriptions while insisting that knowledge of it is historically situated and subject to correction. His associated language of epistemic fracture, epistemic sovereignty, and liberative realism links the production of knowledge to the moral legitimacy of political power and the institutional conditions of emancipation [4-6]. This article argues that the distinctive promise of his approach lies in treating just peace as a truth-oriented, ethically constrained, institutionally

sustained, and psychologically informed practice. The claim requires careful qualification: a coherent philosophical synthesis is not yet evidence of superior peace outcomes, and the practical consequences of CSR remain open to comparative testing.

The present examination is a critical intellectual assessment rather than a biographical tribute. It reconstructs Asongu's central propositions, compares them with established traditions in peace research, identifies their implications for African conflicts and international intervention, and specifies where further theoretical and empirical development is required. The analysis is particularly attentive to the former British Southern Cameroons, where Asongu's constitutional and political writings have addressed contested histories of union, self-determination, and political legitimacy. It also engages the scholarship of Fonkem Achankeng, whose analysis of the colonial factor in African conflict resolution offers a demanding point of comparison [7]. To establish a defensible contribution, it is necessary to show not merely that Asongu shares the ethical aspirations of established scholars but that his synthesis clarifies a problem that their existing frameworks leave incompletely resolved.

1.1. Peace Research and its Philosophical Inheritance

The modern study of peace cannot be separated from the intellectual history of war, power, and political order. Classical approaches in international relations frequently place sovereignty, security, and strategic competition at the center of explanation. Such approaches illuminate the incentives facing states but may neglect the experiences of persons and communities whose grievances remain unresolved after a negotiated settlement. The development of peace research complicated this picture by distinguishing direct violence from structural and cultural conditions that normalize deprivation or exclusion. Work made the analysis of inequality, legitimating narratives, and institutionalized harm indispensable to contemporary peace studies [1,8]. Yet his conceptual innovations also provoke questions concerning the identification of harm, the status of moral judgments, and the distinction between explanation and condemnation. These questions become acute when competing communities offer incompatible accounts of history and justice.

Human-needs approach shifts attention from bargaining over positions to the nonnegotiable requirements of identity, recognition, security, and participation [9]. Expands the field further by understanding peacebuilding as the reconstruction of relationships across levels of society, rather than merely the signature of agreements by elites [2]. These perspectives establish why a settlement can be procedurally successful and substantively unstable. Nevertheless, they do not by themselves settle how mediators should evaluate contradictory historical claims or how communities should distinguish legitimate recognition from demands that would violate the rights of others. Asongu's emphasis on epistemic accountability enters at this juncture. A durable settlement requires more than the accommodation of subjective narratives; it requires procedures capable of investigating their factual bases, correcting misinformation, and distinguishing justified grievance from ideological mobilization.

There is also an important inheritance from political and moral philosophy. Distinction between power and violence challenges the assumption that coercive capacity is identical with political legitimacy, while places fair terms of social cooperation at the center of institutional justice [10,11]. Broaden assessments of development beyond aggregate economic achievement to substantive human capabilities [12,13]. These bodies of work illuminate why peace cannot be measured by the silence of weapons alone. Asongu's potential contribution is to join their concern for human flourishing with an explicit theory of knowledge and a requirement of institutional self-correction. The value of such integration depends upon whether the resulting framework produces sharper diagnoses and more discriminating practical judgments than the concepts already available.

2. Critical Synthetic Realism: Ontological Realism and Epistemic Humility

At the center of CSR lies the claim that reality does not become true through institutional declaration, cultural consensus, or political victory. The reality thesis rejects the reduction of truth to the preferences of a dominant community; the fallibilist thesis simultaneously rejects the assumption that any community's present account of reality is exhaustive. Presents these claims as part of a broader set of theses concerning synthesis, institutional mediation, and ethical responsibility [4]. The conjunction matters for peace studies because conflicts frequently involve both incompatible truth claims and unequal control over the institutions authorized to certify them. A realist orientation makes it possible to investigate what happened; fallibilism makes it necessary to scrutinize every party's description of what happened, including accounts advanced by mediators, governments, armed groups, and international organizations.

This position should not be confused with the naive assertion that an impartial investigator can simply stand outside history and discover an uncontested account of every grievance. Historical records are incomplete, testimony is affected by fear and memory, and institutions differ in their capacity to preserve evidence. Critical realism in the philosophy of science distinguishes a world that exists independently of inquiry from the changing conceptual practices through which that world is known [14]. Applied to conflict analysis, the distinction counsels neither certainty nor skepticism. It supports a disciplined search for warranted conclusions while preserving room for correction when new testimony or archival material emerges. The framework thereby offers an alternative to both propaganda-driven certainty and the false equivalence that treats every competing narrative as equally plausible.

The synthetic dimension of CSR requires further precision. Interdisciplinary integration is valuable only when the different kinds of evidence retain their methodological integrity. A clinical account of trauma cannot establish a constitutional claim, and a constitutional argument cannot determine the prevalence of psychiatric injury. Likewise, a community's historical memory may illuminate experiences of humiliation without resolving every

factual dispute about a political union. Asongu's proposed Critical Synthetic Realist Methodology treats inquiry as layered, fallibilist, and ethically oriented [15]. In peace research, this suggests an explanatory design that connects archival investigation, political economy, legal analysis, social psychology, and locally grounded testimony. The challenge is to specify how disagreements among these domains are adjudicated, rather than invoking synthesis as a substitute for argument.

3. Epistemic Fracture and the Reproduction of Violent Conflict

The notion of epistemic fracture provides one of the most promising connections between Asongu's general philosophy and the study of protracted conflict. The concept can be reconstructed as a systematic disruption in the capacity of persons and institutions to identify relevant evidence, hear credible testimony, evaluate claims, and revise judgments. Such disruption differs from ordinary disagreement. Communities can disagree while preserving shared procedures of inquiry; fracture emerges when those procedures themselves lose credibility or become instruments of domination. In conflict settings, competing educational narratives, controlled media, inaccessible archives, selective prosecutions, and official denials may prevent the emergence of a common factual record. The resulting epistemic environment makes negotiation difficult because concessions can be interpreted not as practical compromises but as acceptance of a false history.

This argument intersects with account of epistemic injustice, particularly the exclusion of persons from the status of credible knowers and from participation in the interpretive resources through which social experience becomes intelligible [16]. It also recalls insistence that social imagination must make possible new relationships across entrenched boundaries [3]. Yet epistemic fracture adds a potentially useful diagnostic distinction: some conflicts persist not simply because parties possess incompatible interests but because the institutions that should investigate and mediate those interests are themselves mistrusted. A commission may collect testimony while failing to establish credibility; a national dialogue may invite representatives while excluding the questions that most urgently require examination. Under such conditions, formal participation does not necessarily amount to epistemic inclusion.

A useful application must nevertheless avoid turning epistemic fracture into an all-purpose label. A theory that explains every conflict explains too little unless it identifies observable mechanisms and differentiates among cases. Researchers might examine whether access to public records is restricted, whether testimony from particular groups is systematically discounted, whether independent inquiry is punished, or whether official histories are insulated from evidentiary challenge. Such indicators would permit comparative assessment of the degree to which institutions enable or obstruct correction. The claim that fracture causes violence would then require attention to causal pathways, temporal sequence, and competing explanations, including economic shocks, armed entrepreneurship, foreign sponsorship, and security dilemmas. This is the point at which philosophical originality must be joined to empirical discipline.

4. Epistemic Sovereignty and the Politics of Recognition

If epistemic fracture describes damaged conditions of knowing, epistemic sovereignty identifies the capacities required for responsible participation in the production and correction of knowledge. Asongu's account should not be read as a defense of individual certainty or the sovereign right to declare one's beliefs immune to criticism. Rather, the concept is most productive when understood as a disciplined form of agency: the ability to inquire, evaluate evidence, challenge coercive narratives, and accept correction without surrendering judgment to institutional intimidation. In divided societies, this capacity is unequally distributed. Some groups control schools, courts, media, and archives, while others must struggle to make their experience legible within public institutions. Peacebuilding that leaves this asymmetry untouched may reproduce the epistemic hierarchy that helped sustain the conflict.

Recognition, however, is not equivalent to automatic validation. A community may be entitled to a hearing without every factual claim it advances being correct; a state may possess legitimate security concerns without every use of coercion being justified. Epistemic sovereignty therefore requires reciprocal accountability. It protects marginalized voices from exclusion while also subjecting all participants to standards of evidence and reasoned criticism. This reciprocity offers a bridge between the ethics of recognition and the requirements of public reason. It is especially relevant where competing claims to victimhood threaten to monopolize moral attention, because a sustainable settlement must recognize actual injury without making injury a permanent exemption from scrutiny.

The institutional implications are concrete. Independent historical commissions, protected investigative journalism, accessible public records, multilingual civic education, and credible judicial review can enlarge the practical capacity of communities to participate in truth-seeking. These reforms do not guarantee reconciliation, nor should they be romanticized as neutral technical devices. Their legitimacy depends upon appointment procedures, resources, independence, and the ability of vulnerable persons to participate without retaliation. A CSR-inspired peace programme would consequently evaluate institutions not only by their formal mandates but by whether they create durable opportunities for contestation, correction, and equal standing in public deliberation.

5. Liberative Realism: Justice Without Revolutionary Absolutism

Asongu's liberative realism seeks to hold together two commitments that political discourse frequently separates: the moral urgency of emancipation and the practical constraints of responsible institutional change. His published account of faith, power, and emancipation emphasizes the relationship between truth, freedom, and the ethics of resistance [5]. In peace studies, this orientation challenges a familiar opposition between the demand for justice and the demand for stability. A politics that

treats order as the overriding good may preserve structures of domination, while a politics that regards the justice of its cause as sufficient authorization for every means risks reproducing the coercion it opposes. Liberative realism insists that the moral quality of liberation must be examined not only through its declared objectives but through its methods, foreseeable consequences, and institutional aftermath.

The position is compatible with the central insight of nonviolent political theory: means and ends cannot be separated without moral cost. Demonstrates the strategic possibilities of organized nonviolent action, while (2011) analyze the comparative performance of civil resistance campaigns [17,18]. These works do not establish that nonviolence is universally successful or that armed actors will reliably respond to moral appeals. They do, however, challenge the assumption that coercive escalation is the only credible response to injustice. Asongu's contribution is to connect this strategic debate with an account of epistemic responsibility. A movement should be willing to scrutinize its own narratives, acknowledge civilian suffering caused by its actions, and evaluate whether proposed tactics advance the dignity and freedom they claim to defend.

The approach also resists a purely rhetorical understanding of just peace. Liberation requires arrangements capable of administering justice, protecting dissent, distributing public goods, and constraining future rulers. The overthrow of an oppressive authority does not automatically create the habits or institutions needed for non-domination. In this respect, liberative realism converges with scholarship on statebuilding and peace implementation, but its emphasis falls on the ethical formation of political agency as well as institutional design. The practical test is demanding: can a movement preserve pluralism when it acquires power, protect minorities whose aspirations differ from its own, and subject its leaders to procedures of correction? Without affirmative answers, liberation risks becoming a change in the identity of rulers rather than a transformation of the conditions of domination.

6. Colonial Histories, African Conflicts, and the Work of Fonkem Achankeng

The African setting gives Asongu's philosophy a particular historical urgency. Colonial boundaries, unequal incorporation, linguistic hierarchies, and contested transitions to independence have left institutional arrangements whose legitimacy cannot be evaluated through present-day state sovereignty alone. Argues that peace initiatives in Africa often neglect the colonial origins of conflict and privilege the management of violence over the transformation of its underlying causes [7]. His critique challenges external interveners who treat military stabilization and administrative reform as substitutes for confronting historical grievances. This argument provides an important comparison for CSR. Achankeng supplies a historically grounded account of how colonial relations continue to structure conflict, while Asongu offers a philosophical vocabulary for examining the knowledge claims, institutional legitimacy, and moral responsibilities through which those histories are interpreted.

The relationship between the two perspectives is complementary but not identical. Achankeng's insistence on the colonial factor guards against explanations that attribute African conflict exclusively to contemporary governance failure or supposedly primordial ethnic hostility. Asongu's realism, in turn, requires that colonial explanations themselves be tested against the particular histories of each conflict. Colonial inheritance may be indispensable without being causally sufficient. Postcolonial elites, armed organizations, regional inequalities, transnational commercial interests, and contemporary policy choices may also contribute to violence. An adequate analysis must therefore avoid replacing a simplistic governance narrative with an equally totalizing colonial narrative. Historical accountability is strengthened, rather than weakened, when the relative contribution of different causal mechanisms is specified.

This distinction also affects the practice of mediation. External actors may enter a conflict with incentives to secure a ceasefire, reduce migration, protect strategic interests, or demonstrate diplomatic success. Local communities may instead understand the central issue as recognition, constitutional consent, language rights, land, or the terms of political association. A CSR approach would ask how the agenda was constructed, whose historical claims were treated as admissible, and what forms of evidence were excluded from negotiation. Achankeng's analysis helps explain why imposed settlements may lack legitimacy; CSR seeks to clarify the epistemic and ethical failures through which imposition is rationalized. Together, these perspectives suggest that durable peace requires both attention to colonial histories and institutional mechanisms through which disputed histories can be publicly examined.

7. The Former British Southern Cameroons: Constitutional Legitimacy and the Ethics of Peace

Asongu's writings on the former British Southern Cameroons offer a concrete setting in which to examine the relationship between historical interpretation and political legitimacy. His work on forced unity and self-determination advances claims concerning the constitutional foundations of political association, the status of historical agreements, and the obligations of institutions toward communities whose consent is contested. Such claims are not resolved merely by invoking territorial integrity or, conversely, by invoking the moral vocabulary of self-determination. They require careful analysis of the relevant legal instruments, political history, institutional practice, and the rights of persons affected by competing constitutional proposals. A serious scholarly assessment must distinguish Asongu's normative argument from independent findings concerning each disputed historical or legal proposition.

The conflict also illustrates the limitations of reducing peace to an agreement between armed representatives. Civilians may experience displacement, disrupted schooling, economic insecurity, trauma, and the erosion of trust in public authority. Language, identity, and historical memory shape the meaning of political demands, while the violence of multiple actors can generate new grievances that outlast the original constitutional

dispute. A CSR analysis would therefore separate the question of historical legitimacy from the question of permissible means. Even a defensible political grievance does not justify indiscriminate violence, hostage-taking, attacks on education, or the collective punishment of civilians. The moral standing of a cause and the moral standing of its methods must remain analytically distinct.

This separation offers a constructive path for peacebuilding without prejudging a final constitutional arrangement. Truth-seeking about historical agreements, protection of civilian rights, credible participation by affected communities, independent accountability for abuses, and meaningful consideration of political alternatives can proceed as necessary conditions of legitimate negotiation. None of these measures predetermines whether federalism, autonomy, independence, or another arrangement will prove most defensible. Their importance lies in creating a process in which political outcomes are not merely imposed by coercive capacity. The framework's practical value will depend upon whether it can help mediators formulate procedures accepted as fair by parties who disagree profoundly about the history and future of the polity.

8. International Intervention, Iraq, and the Limits of Imperial Certainty

Asongu's critique of interventionist overconfidence extends the relevance of his peace thought beyond Africa. His work on the Iraq war, identified in his published bibliography as The Iraq Quagmire, reflects a concern with geopolitical power, historical misunderstanding, and the consequences of military projects undertaken with excessive certainty about their anticipated outcomes [19]. The analytical importance of this critique is not that all external intervention is illegitimate or that the international system can dispense with coercive protection in every circumstance. Rather, it directs attention to the discrepancy between the stated moral purposes of intervention and the institutional knowledge required to realize those purposes. Military superiority does not confer cultural understanding, and the ability to remove a government does not establish the capacity to construct legitimate political institutions.

This argument intersects with the critique of liberal peacebuilding developed by and the concerns about internationally driven statebuilding articulated by [20,21]. External actors often presume that elections, market reforms, administrative restructuring, and security-sector modernization will produce a stable political order when transferred into societies with different historical experiences and institutional capacities. The problem is not that these institutions lack value, but that their effects depend upon local legitimacy, political incentives, social trust, and the distribution of power. CSR adds the requirement that interveners examine the epistemic assumptions embedded in their plans. Claims about what a society needs, what local actors desire, and which institutions will function should be treated as hypotheses requiring contextual evidence rather than as conclusions guaranteed by ideological conviction.

A credible critique must also recognize the tragic choices sometimes confronting international actors. Nonintervention can leave populations exposed to mass violence; intervention can intensify conflict, create dependency, or undermine local authority. There is no universal decision rule capable of eliminating these dilemmas. Liberative realism therefore has to become a practice of prudential judgment under uncertainty, in which foreseeable harms, available alternatives, local agency, legal constraints, and post-intervention obligations are evaluated together. Its distinctive moral demand is that powerful actors should be accountable not only for the purity of their stated intentions but also for the adequacy of their knowledge and the consequences of their decisions.

9. Psychological Trauma, Human Flourishing, and the Afterlife of Violence

One important extension of Asongu's peace framework arises from his engagement with psychology and counseling. Armed conflict damages institutions and infrastructure, but it also transforms the emotional and relational conditions under which political life becomes possible. Fear, grief, humiliation, mistrust, and unresolved trauma can survive formal peace agreements and shape the behavior of individuals who were never direct combatants. Asongu's holistic account of resilience emphasizes the interaction of psychological, relational, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of human experience [22]. The relevance to peace studies is substantial: a community may regain physical security while remaining unable to trust public institutions, reestablish ordinary relationships, or imagine a shared future.

The psychological dimension must nevertheless be handled without pathologizing political dissent. Anger at injustice may be rational; suspicion of institutions with histories of abuse may reflect accurate learning rather than psychiatric dysfunction. A trauma-informed approach should therefore distinguish clinical needs from legitimate political grievances and avoid using therapy as a substitute for institutional reform. The most promising contribution of CSR is to insist that psychological healing and structural justice are complementary rather than competing projects. Counseling, education, community rituals, reparations, and credible accountability may each address different dimensions of post-conflict life, but no single intervention can perform the work of all the others.

This insight is especially relevant for displaced populations, survivors of sexual violence, former combatants, and children whose education has been disrupted. Peace programmes often prioritize reintegration indicators such as employment, school attendance, or the surrender of weapons, while paying less attention to the quality of social belonging and the durability of trust. A holistic approach would ask whether people experience safety, recognition, agency, and access to care, and whether institutions have ceased reproducing the humiliations associated with conflict. These questions suggest measurable outcomes, although their assessment requires culturally appropriate instruments and safeguards against coercive disclosure of traumatic experiences.

10. Religion, Moral Authority, and the Practice of Just Peace

Asongu's theological writings introduce a further dimension by asking how religious communities can support liberation without confusing spiritual authority with political infallibility. His critical-liberative orientation treats dignity, truthfulness, and solidarity with vulnerable persons as central obligations of religious life. In peace studies, this approach recognizes that religious institutions may provide trusted networks, moral vocabularies, educational resources, and opportunities for reconciliation unavailable to formal political actors. Yet religious institutions can also legitimize exclusion, protect powerful patrons, or encourage silence in the face of abuse. Their contribution to peace must therefore be assessed through their conduct rather than assumed from their religious identity.

This position is compatible with account of the ambivalence of the sacred, which shows that religion may contribute to both violence and reconciliation [23]. It also resonates with Lederach's attention to middle-range leadership and the relationships that sustain peace processes beyond elite diplomacy. Asongu's additional emphasis on epistemic fracture raises a pointed question: what happens when institutions that preach reconciliation refuse to investigate credible allegations or permit dissenting testimony? In such circumstances, moral authority can become a shield against accountability. A credible religious peace witness must therefore join forgiveness with truth-telling, compassion with institutional reform, and pastoral care with protection for those who disclose wrongdoing.

The framework also cautions against turning theological language into an exclusive condition of participation. Peacebuilding takes place among persons with different religious convictions and among those who reject religious explanations altogether. A publicly defensible programme must therefore articulate its institutional and ethical recommendations in terms accessible to diverse participants. The theological claim that persons possess sacred dignity may motivate some actors, while human-rights reasoning, constitutional commitments, or philosophical accounts of equal moral standing may motivate others. CSR's aspiration toward a shared inquiry into reality is strongest when it permits such plural motivations without requiring premature agreement on ultimate metaphysical foundations.

11. Nonviolence, Civilian Protection, and Moral Constraints on Resistance

The moral discipline of resistance is central to any theory that seeks to combine emancipation with just peace. Political violence is frequently defended through an appeal to necessity: when peaceful avenues are closed, coercion is said to become unavoidable. Such claims cannot be dismissed without examining the conditions of repression, but neither can they be accepted as sufficient justification for particular tactics. The distinction between a legitimate grievance and a permissible method of struggle is foundational. International humanitarian norms, the principle of civilian immunity, and the prohibition of collective punishment establish limits that do not disappear when one side regards its political cause as just. Liberative realism is meaningful only if it holds state authorities, armed movements, and external supporters to standards that do not change with partisan identification.

Nonviolent action should be understood as more than the absence of physical force. Describes forms of organized noncooperation capable of altering the sources of political power, while provide comparative evidence concerning civil resistance campaigns [17,18]. Their findings should not be converted into an unconditional guarantee that nonviolent strategies will succeed. Repression, organizational fragmentation, international support, and the character of political institutions all affect outcomes. Nevertheless, the research demonstrates that the strategic repertoire of resistance is broader than military confrontation. A CSR-informed analysis would investigate whether movements possess credible methods of discipline, mechanisms for correcting misinformation, and institutions capable of restraining retaliatory violence.

Civilian protection must also remain distinct from the political preferences of those being protected. Humanitarian assistance cannot legitimately be conditioned upon acceptance of a particular constitutional settlement, ideological narrative, or claim to representation. This principle has practical consequences for displaced persons, schools, health facilities, and communities caught between armed actors. It requires peace advocates to resist the temptation to treat civilians as instruments of bargaining. In this sense, the ethics of means is not a secondary refinement of liberation; it is evidence of whether a movement's conception of freedom can survive the exercise of power.

12. Institutional Legitimacy, Constitutional Consent, and Political Reconstruction

The relationship between legitimacy and coercion occupies an important place in Asongu's political philosophy. His discussion of political power through CSR argues that institutions cannot establish their legitimacy merely by pointing to their continued existence or their capacity to enforce decisions [24]. Their claims must be examined in relation to historical foundations, publicly defensible procedures, and the rights of persons governed. This argument is especially relevant in conflicts where political boundaries or constitutional arrangements are disputed. State recognition and administrative continuity are important legal and practical facts, but they do not eliminate the moral question of whether political authority is exercised through justifiable institutions.

The claim requires qualification because consent is neither simple nor singular. Political communities contain minorities, dissenters, migrants, and persons whose preferences change across generations. No historical referendum or founding agreement can mechanically resolve every later dispute. Legitimate political order therefore requires more than the discovery of an original moment of consent. It also requires ongoing opportunities for representation, contestation, constitutional amendment, rights protection, and peaceful transfer of power. A CSR account of legitimacy is strongest when it integrates historical inquiry with these continuing conditions of accountability. Otherwise, an

appeal to founding truth could itself become a form of political absolutism.

Peace implementation consequently demands attention to the design of institutions that can accommodate disagreement without renewed violence. Constitutional guarantees, decentralization, independent courts, language protections, and credible electoral administration may each contribute under appropriate conditions. Their suitability cannot be inferred from abstract preference alone. They must be assessed against demographic patterns, historical grievances, administrative capacity, economic incentives, and the risks facing vulnerable groups. The synthetic requirement of CSR is thus practically demanding: it requires political reconstruction to be informed by multiple bodies of evidence while remaining answerable to a coherent account of human dignity and public legitimacy.

13. Micro-Minorities and the Ethics of Inclusion

An underdeveloped but potentially important element of Asongu's public thought concerns the vulnerability of what he describes as micro-minorities: communities whose interests may be neglected even within movements organized around the claims of a larger marginalized population. This insight complicates the binary narratives common in conflict politics. A community may be disadvantaged in relation to a dominant state while exercising coercive power over smaller populations within its own territory or political coalition. The language of collective emancipation can then obscure the distribution of voice and vulnerability inside the emancipatory project. A serious account of just peace must therefore ask not only whether a majority or regional community has been recognized but also whether its internal minorities can dissent safely.

This argument is closely related to the problem of nested domination. Institutions designed to correct one historical injustice may generate another if they assume that a recognized group possesses a unified interest. Peace negotiations that allocate representation exclusively among major armed factions or ethnic blocs may leave women, displaced persons, religious minorities, persons with disabilities, and small local communities without meaningful influence. The problem is not solved by symbolic consultation. It requires procedures through which less powerful participants can shape agendas, challenge proposed arrangements, and seek remedies when agreements expose them to harm. CSR's epistemic sovereignty supplies a philosophical rationale for such participation, but the principle must be translated into institutional design.

The concern also guards against an uncritical politics of identity. Collective identities are real and politically consequential, yet they do not exhaust the experiences or rights of their members. Individuals may inhabit multiple affiliations and reject the political claims made in their name. A framework oriented toward truth and dignity must preserve the possibility of internal disagreement. It should examine who claims to speak for a community, how that authority is obtained, and whether dissenting members can contest it without retaliation. These questions are essential if liberation is to avoid reproducing the structures of exclusion against which it originally protested.

14. Truth Commissions, Historical Memory, and the Limits of Reconciliation

Truth commissions and public inquiries offer a particularly useful setting in which to test the relationship between epistemic fracture and institutional repair. Their purpose is not simply to collect stories but to establish a credible account of patterns of abuse, identify institutional responsibilities, and create conditions for acknowledgment. Yet truth commissions operate under political constraints. Mandates may exclude certain periods, evidence may be unavailable, witnesses may fear retaliation, and governments may resist recommendations. The resulting record can become authoritative without being complete. A CSR approach would therefore treat a commission's findings as warranted public judgments that remain open to supplementation and correction, rather than as an exhaustive closure of historical inquiry.

Reconciliation poses a related danger when it is detached from accountability. Calls to forgive may serve genuine moral purposes, but they can also become instruments for silencing victims or avoiding institutional reform. Explores the difficult terrain between vengeance and forgiveness in societies emerging from mass violence [25]. Her analysis underscores that there is no single moral formula capable of resolving the demands of punishment, acknowledgment, restitution, and social coexistence. Asongu's emphasis on truth and dignity offers a way to resist premature reconciliation: the language of peace should not require injured persons to deny the reality of what happened or accept continuing structures of domination.

The most defensible understanding of reconciliation is therefore procedural and relational rather than sentimental. It concerns the gradual establishment of conditions in which persons can coexist under institutions that protect rights, acknowledge harm, and provide credible avenues for redress. Such coexistence need not require agreement about every interpretation of history, nor must it depend upon the immediate restoration of personal trust. A community may achieve meaningful progress when violence becomes less likely, public records become more reliable, and victims can participate in political life without fear. CSR can contribute by clarifying why these achievements depend upon both factual accountability and the willingness to revise inherited narratives.

15. Comparative Assessment: What Is Distinctive in Asongu's Peace Thought?

The question of originality must be answered with intellectual restraint. Galtung had already established the insufficiency of negative peace; Burton had emphasized basic human needs; Lederach had elaborated relational conflict transformation; Achankeng had foregrounded colonial histories and the limitations of imposed conflict management; and critical peace scholars had questioned the assumptions of externally driven liberal

peacebuilding. It would therefore be inaccurate to present Asongu as the first thinker to connect peace with justice, truth, or institutional legitimacy. His distinctive contribution is more plausibly located in the architecture of integration: he attempts to connect ontological realism, fallibilist knowledge, epistemic injustice, constitutional legitimacy, moral restraint, and psychological healing within a single normative account of peace.

That architecture yields three propositions worth treating as candidates for scholarly innovation. First, conflicts can be intensified by institutional failures of knowing, not only by material competition or incompatible identities. Second, emancipation should be evaluated by whether its methods and subsequent institutions remain accountable to truth and human dignity, rather than by the righteousness of its declared objectives. Third, just peace requires the reconstruction of the social capacities through which persons can contest power, correct public narratives, and participate in collective decision-making. None of these propositions is wholly without precedent, but their systematic combination may sharpen diagnosis across conflicts whose historical, psychological, and constitutional dimensions are usually studied separately.

A stronger claim of originality would require demonstrating explanatory or practical advantages. Does CSR identify failures overlooked by competing theories? Can its concepts be operationalized reliably by independent researchers? Does a CSR-informed intervention produce better outcomes than established conflict-transformation approaches under comparable conditions? Without such evidence, the framework should be described as a promising philosophical synthesis rather than a validated peacebuilding technology. This distinction is not a concession to skepticism; it follows directly from Asongu's commitment to fallibility and epistemic accountability. A theory of peace that cannot accept criticism would contradict its own account of just peace.

16. Objections: Moral Universalism, Measurement, and the Risks of Synthesis

One objection concerns the relationship between objective truth and political pluralism. Parties to a conflict may disagree not only about facts but also about the moral principles through which facts acquire significance. A realist framework could be misused if mediators claim privileged access to the truth and dismiss dissent as epistemic deficiency. The response must distinguish a commitment to mind-independent reality from an entitlement to rule in its name. Fallibilism requires public reasons, independent evidence, and institutions through which powerful actors can be challenged. A claim of realism is not a certificate of neutrality. In fact, the more strongly a peace programme invokes truth, the more carefully it must disclose its assumptions and the procedures by which those assumptions can be questioned.

A second objection concerns measurement. Epistemic fracture, sovereignty, dignity, and liberative realism are philosophically evocative, but without operational definitions they risk becoming labels applied retrospectively to outcomes researchers already favor. The response is to construct modest, falsifiable propositions and identify observable institutional practices. For example, the degree of public access to archives, the protection of dissenting testimony, the independence of inquiries, and the treatment of minority-language claims could be measured with appropriate caution. Such indicators would not exhaust the concepts, but they would create opportunities for empirical comparison and methodological disagreement. Researchers should also investigate whether observed relationships persist after accounting for economic inequality, armed capacity, and international involvement.

A third objection concerns synthesis itself. A framework that draws simultaneously from theology, psychology, philosophy, law, and peace research may appear comprehensive while masking incompatible assumptions or unequal evidentiary standards. The appropriate response is not to retreat into disciplinary isolation but to distinguish levels of explanation. Historical analysis can establish what particular actors did; psychology can examine patterns of trauma and cognition; law can identify applicable norms; and moral philosophy can assess the defensibility of institutions and actions. The synthetic argument succeeds only when it specifies how these contributions relate and where their conclusions remain independent. The discipline of synthesis consists in resisting precisely the shortcuts that interdisciplinary rhetoric can encourage.

17. A Research Agenda for Evaluating CSR in Peacebuilding

The next stage in the development of Asongu's peace thought should be comparative and empirical. A first research programme could investigate whether institutions with higher levels of epistemic openness are associated with greater public trust and lower risks of renewed violence after controlling for other relevant conditions. Case selection should include conflicts with different colonial histories, regime types, and settlement arrangements, rather than focusing exclusively on settings that appear to confirm the theory. Researchers could combine archival analysis, interviews, institutional indicators, and longitudinal measures of political violence. The design should also examine reverse causation: institutions may become more open because violence declines, rather than violence declining because institutions become more open.

A second programme could test the distinction between emancipatory claims and liberative practices. Movements might be compared according to their internal procedures for protecting dissent, disciplining members, acknowledging civilian harm, and preparing for post-conflict governance. Such research would illuminate whether the ethical constraints proposed by liberative realism correspond to measurable differences in the quality of political transition. A third programme could examine whether peace dialogues that explicitly investigate disputed historical narratives produce more durable legitimacy than processes focused narrowly on power sharing. These questions would require careful attention to selection effects, because parties willing to participate

in historical inquiry may already differ from those who refuse it.

A fourth programme should investigate the psychological dimensions of institutional repair. Trauma-informed services, community acknowledgment, educational reconstruction, and legal accountability may interact in ways not captured by conventional measures of ceasefire compliance. Mixed-methods studies could examine whether combinations of these interventions support greater trust, civic participation, and perceived dignity. Importantly, researchers should not presume that the reduction of reported distress is equivalent to reconciliation or that political protest indicates therapeutic failure. A rigorous CSR research agenda would permit findings that complicate its initial assumptions and would treat those findings as opportunities for theoretical improvement rather than threats to the framework's identity.

18. Conclusion: Toward a Discipline of Truthful and Just Peace

Januarius Asongu's contribution to peace and conflict studies is most persuasively understood as an effort to connect the moral purpose of peacebuilding with the epistemic and institutional conditions of its possibility. His Critical Synthetic Realism rejects the assumption that political authority or cultural consensus can make a proposition true, while acknowledging that every community approaches reality through historically situated and revisable interpretations. His account of epistemic fracture directs attention to institutions that distort testimony and obstruct correction; epistemic sovereignty identifies the capacities through which persons can participate responsibly in public truth-seeking. Liberative realism then asks whether struggles against domination preserve the moral discipline and institutional responsibility necessary to prevent new forms of oppression. Together, these ideas offer a coherent orientation toward peace as more than the suspension of armed hostilities.

The framework is especially relevant to African conflicts in which colonial history, constitutional legitimacy, collective identity, and external intervention remain contested. In dialogue with Fonkem Achankeng's critique of conflict management, Asongu's approach suggests that imposed stability cannot substitute for the investigation of historical grievances and the construction of legitimate political relationships. Its relevance also extends to international intervention, nonviolent resistance, religious peacebuilding, trauma recovery, and the protection of minorities within emancipatory movements. Yet its promise should not be mistaken for demonstrated effectiveness. The philosophical concepts require clearer operational definitions, the historical claims require independent scrutiny, and the practical recommendations require comparative assessment. The most convincing expression of CSR would be a research programme willing to revise its own judgments when evidence demands it.

The enduring question for peace studies is not simply how violence may be stopped, but how persons and institutions can learn to live with disagreement without converting uncertainty into domination. Asongu's most important insight is that just peace requires both moral commitment and the discipline of correction. Truth without humility becomes a weapon of authority; humility without a commitment to truth risks surrendering judgment to power. Liberation without institutional responsibility may reproduce coercion, while stability without justice may preserve the conditions of future conflict. A mature philosophy of peace must therefore hold together historical accountability, the protection of human dignity, practical prudence, and the capacity for self-criticism. Whether CSR ultimately becomes an influential school of peace research will depend upon the rigor with which these aspirations are translated into scholarship, institutional design, and demonstrably responsible practice.

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