

**THE UK'S REPARATIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT:
COLONIAL HARM, RECTIFICATORY JUSTICE, AND ATROCITY
PREVENTION**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that British colonial injustice grounds a special reparations-based responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes, especially in its former colonies. Through an analysis of the enduring economic, political, and social legacies of British rule, it demonstrates that colonial harm has created structural precarity in post-colonial states, increasing contemporary atrocity risk and complicating the legitimacy of norms for preventing and responding to atrocity crimes, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This argument is advanced through the novel framework of the Reparative responsibility to protect (R-r2p), which combines backward-looking liability with forward-looking capacity, recognising that part of the UK's protective capacity derives from colonial exploitation. The UK's foremost obligations under this framework are to its former colonies, while weaker reparative obligations extend to other post-colonial states.

This thesis is an exercise in non-ideal normative political theory, informed by historical analysis. The first part of the thesis establishes the colonial harms grounding reparative responsibility, while the second examines how that responsibility should be discharged. Four case studies – Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria – are used throughout to demonstrate the legacies of colonial rule. The thesis formulates five guiding principles for assessing which measures best align with the R-r2p: reparative grounding, non-domination, agency, reparative effectiveness, and sustainability. It then assesses measures of protection, prevention, and diplomacy, arguing that refugee protection and asylum, humanitarian assistance, development and capacity-building, and advocacy-based norm-brokering anchored in reconciliation hold the greatest reparative potential.

This thesis contributes to research on the R2P and its post-colonial critiques by offering a reparative account of special responsibility within debates on atrocity prevention and the R2P, guiding principles for allocating and prioritising measures, and a novel approach to norm diplomacy based in inclusivity. Ultimately, this thesis identifies how atrocity prevention can be reconfigured in more effective and just terms.

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Acronyms

APCR2P - Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

CAR - Central African Republic

EU - European Union

EWP – Early Warning Project

FAC - Foreign Affairs Committee

G7 - Group of 7

GCR2P - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GNI - Gross National Income

HDI - Human Development Index

ICISS - International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

IDC - International Development Committee

IDP - Internally Displaced Persons

IMF - International Monetary Fund

IRC - International Red Cross

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO - Non-Government Organisation

P5 - Permanent 5 (members of the United Nations Security Council)

R-r2p Reparative responsibility to protect

R2P - Responsibility to Protect

RP - Responsible Protection

RSF - Rapid Support Forces

RwP - Responsibility while Protecting

SAF - Sudanese Armed Forces

UK - United Kingdom

UN - United Nations

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHRC - United Nations Human Rights Council

UFP - Uniting for Peace

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

UNSG - United Nations Secretary General

US - United States

WHO - World Health Organisation

WSOD - World Summit Outcome Document

1. Introduction

Almost eight years after the Myanmar junta's "clearance operations" against the Rohingya began (GCR2P, 2026a), minority ethnic groups across the state continue to face mass atrocity violence. The crisis, however, is not merely contemporary. Persecution against the Rohingya, often referred to as the most persecuted minority group in the world (UNHRC, 2017), is closely tied to legacies of British colonial rule. The decision of British colonial administrators to artificially include the Rohingya heartland of Rakhine within the borders of post-colonial Myanmar (Hein, 2018, p. 365; Shahabuddin, 2019, p. 336) while simultaneously refusing to fully acknowledge the Rohingya as native to the region (Ferguson, 2015, p. 4) has left the group in a position of profound structural precarity. The crisis in Myanmar is not an exception but an illustration of a wider historical pattern. Although mass killings may have declined *generally* since the turbulent years at the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s (Butcher et al., 2020, pp. 1533-4), the spectre of mass atrocity violence often looms in many post-colonial states. According to both the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P, 2026i) and the Early Warning Project (EWP, 2026), the vast majority of states in which mass atrocities are currently being perpetrated were once colonies of Western European empires.¹ The legacies of colonial rule, as Bellamy makes explicit, have played a role in weakening resilience to mass atrocities in many of these states (2014, p. 29).

¹ Combined, the GCR2P and EWP list: Afghanistan, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), Central Sahel, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOTP), Myanmar, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela. 18 of these territories were under the administration of Western European empires at some point prior to independence.

These crises are rarely remedied despite the innovation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Under the norm, states have a responsibility to protect their populations from four “mass atrocities”: genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Should states fail to meet this responsibility, then the international community – through the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – must act (UNGA, 2005a, p. 30; Evans, 2024, p. 327). Yet many have argued that rather than providing an answer to these crises, the R2P has allowed Western states to evade responsibility for the consequences of their rule by placing primary responsibility on the post-colonial state itself (Chandler, 2016, p. 48; Getachew, 2019, p. 236; Whyte, 2017, p. 317). Likewise, since responsibility is diffused across the international community and remains only general, the framework invites inaction due to what Hjorthen and Duus-Otterström term the ‘duty-specification question’ (2016, p. 187). At the same time, there is understandably significant hesitancy among post-colonial states to invite the protection of their former subjugators (Glanville, 2021, p. 37; Nuruzzaman, 2022, p. 4). This reflects a broader perception that the R2P and mass atrocity prevention are neo-colonial in nature (see, for example: Hindawi, 2022).² There is a puzzle, then, at the heart of this: Western states are in part responsible for the structural precarity that gives rise to mass atrocities and have the capacity for protection, while simultaneously being the least likely to be welcomed by the populations of post-colonial states. Given this puzzle, it is no surprise that international efforts to provide humanitarian protection are increasingly viewed as “hollow” (see, for example: Hehir, 2019).

² This thesis is using “atrocity prevention” as a more general umbrella term to refer to any action where the primary intended aim is to stop any of the four mass atrocity crimes as defined above (UNGA, 2005a, p. 30), either while they are occurring or before they occur. Section 1.3.5 provides a more comprehensive discussion of the distinction between “atrocity prevention” and the R2P.

Resolving this puzzle requires a framework which is sufficiently sensitive to historical injustice and the responsibilities it generates. In pursuit of this end, this thesis proposes the adoption of a novel model titled the Reparative responsibility to protect (R-r2p), specifically in the context of the UK, as its central contribution.³ As such, this thesis is not primarily empirical but *normative*. It is not an attempt to provide an answer as to how to end all mass atrocities – an ideal to work towards rather than a realistic goal⁴ (Gallagher et al., 2024, p. 311) – but an endeavour to understand how and to whom a responsibility to protect should be allocated when past injustice and present-day vulnerability intertwine. In doing so, this thesis should be considered as an exercise in normative political theory and is broadly “non-ideal” in orientation as it is concerned with ‘what we should do here and now’ (McKenna, 2023, p. 24), as will be explored more comprehensively in Section 1.4.1. In finding a solution to the puzzle, the thesis is guided by a rectificatory ideal, bridging the gap between pragmatic protection and reparative justice.⁵

The central claim of the R-r2p is that states have a direct responsibility to protect populations whom they have made vulnerable through past injustices, especially when colonial in nature. In arguing this, this thesis not only addresses the puzzle outlined above but also provides a compelling response to the duty-specification question outlined above (Hjorthen and Duus-Otterström, 2016, p. 187).

³ This thesis is styling the Reparative responsibility to protect with only the first initial capitalised, while keeping the remainder of the phrase in lowercase. While the model proposed by this thesis should be understood as a response to the R2P formally defined, this stylistic choice serves to emphasise that the model is *not strictly* the R2P; rather, it is a model which follows the spirit of the original norm if not its letter (see Section 1.3.5 for more detail). As such, the decision to frame the Reparative responsibility to protect as the R-r2p rather than the R-R2P is not merely an aesthetic one, but an intentional normative decision.

⁴ Indeed, data provided by the Pardee Institute has determined that 111 countries around the world experienced some form of mass atrocity during 2024 (Meisel et al., 2024).

⁵ This thesis is broadly using both reparation and rectification interchangeably (see Section 1.3.4 for more detail).

While previous attempts to allocate special responsibilities (Bukovansky et al., 2012, p. 57) to protect have largely done so on the bases of capacity and effectiveness (Bukovansky et al., 2012, p. 222; Pattison, 2010, p. 36), liability (Ralph and Souter, 2015, pp. 710-1), or a combination of these foundations (Glanville, 2021, pp. 99-101; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 8; Miller, 2007, pp. 100-1), the R-r2p not only combines these bases but sees them as fundamentally intertwined: the UK's capacity stems *from* the same injustice that makes it liable. More broadly, this thesis contributes to debates on which measures should be taken in pursuit of mass atrocity prevention, how reparation might be achieved, and offers a novel approach to norm diplomacy. In providing these contributions, this thesis challenges the perception that the R2P and atrocity prevention are irredeemably neo-colonial with the creation of the R-r2p, in pursuit of a world where fewer mass atrocity crises go unjustly unremedied.

This chapter first provides background to the research, explaining the development of the R2P norm and the challenges it (and its associated norms) faces. Following this, the chapter explains the thesis' research puzzle and sets out the research questions. The chapter then outlines the methodology, including a rationale for focusing on the UK and the selected case studies, the normative outlook of the thesis, and provides clarification on key concepts. The remainder of the chapter concerns the thesis' arguments, contributions, and its structure.

1.1. Research Background: Challenges to the R2P Norm

Following the genocides of the 1990s, including in the former Belgian colony of Rwanda, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

(ICISS) attempted to respond to the challenges facing humanitarian protection by proposing the “Responsibility to Protect”, a novel framework for action (ICISS, 2001, xi). The Commission, made up of experts from around the world and co-chaired by Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, made the case that when a state fails to protect its own populations from mass atrocity crimes, two things happen: one, it loses its right to sovereignty; and two, the international community has a *responsibility* to intervene to protect said populations (ICISS, 2001, xi). Even from the outset, though not explicitly concerned with responsibility for crises in former colonies, the Commission seemed well aware of the potential toxicity of the norm, writing that local ownership must be achieved so as to avert ‘any suspicion that [it] is a form of neo-colonial imperialism’ (ICISS, 2001, p. 45).

Following the 2001 report, a narrower, slimmed down version of the R2P was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 (UNGA, 2005a, p. 30) before being developed further in 2009 under the guidance of the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) into the three-pillar model (UNGA, 2009a). Under this model, responsibility lies first and foremost with the state itself (Pillar I), with the international community having a responsibility to help states meet this obligation (Pillar II); only when the state is unwilling or unable to protect its populations from mass atrocities should the international community intercede (Pillar III). While the success of this innovation should not be ignored, the failure to fully account for the role historical injustice might play in the development of the norm has had consequences for its application.

Indeed, although backing seemed so widespread by 2010 that few states could – or would – argue against it (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, p. 357; Serrano, 2010, p. 175), support since the 2011 UNSC-sanctioned intervention in Libya by

members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has been more turbulent. Some have even gone as far as claiming that the R2P is dead because of this (Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 322), though such claims are somewhat exaggerated (Evans, 2015, p. 34; Gallagher, 2025, p. 498; Quinton-Brown, 2023, p. 19). Most states, for instance, continue to offer at least rhetorical support to the R2P as demonstrated through its relatively positive appearances in resolutions across the UN (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 168; GCR2P, 2026f; GCR2P, 2026g; GCR2P, 2026h; Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 5; Rhoads and Welsh, 2019, p. 604; Scherzinger, 2023, p. 81). It is important, however, not to overstate the relevance of these statements – most refer only to the notion that primary responsibility for protection lies with the state itself and do little to operationalise the norm, suggesting that it is toxic in praxis even if not in theory. One must thus consider *why* the norm is toxic and how this might be mitigated in order to bring about a greater degree of humanitarian protection.

Centrally, reference to the norm in this manner reflects a perception of the norm as neo-colonial which has only grown since the Libyan intervention (Graubart, 2015, p. 201). Indeed, despite many academics drawing attention to the norm's non-Western credentials (Adams, 2021, p. 15; Chalk et al., 2012, p. 40; Nuruzzaman, 2022, p. 4; Stefan, 2021, p. 201; Ziegler, 2016, p. 268), others have critiqued the R2P as having an explicitly colonial heritage (Hindawi, 2022, p. 41; Mamdani, 2010, p. 55). Pourmokhtari goes even further, arguing that the 'R2P neatly reproduces the exhausted colonial legacies of the past' (2013, p. 1785). This has been in part heightened by the parallel growth in the perception that the R2P is synonymous with military intervention among some states (Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 375), as well as a willingness of Western states to link the norm to regime change (Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 9). Regime change is understood by Nili, in this sense, as a

reproduction of the colonial civilising mission: 'our purported responsibility is to help stop the tragedies, and then show 'them' how to emulate 'us'' (2011, p. 43). This is especially problematic, according to some academics, since the proponents of the mission are often not innocent, but in part responsible for the crises from which populations need to be "saved" (Brown and Bohm, 2016, p. 911; Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1096; Dunford, 2025, pp. 622-3). Many have noted that interventions in the Global South by such states are often understood as almost entirely self-interested (Clausen and Albrecht, 2021, p. 1219; Evans, 2024, p. 327).

The R2P might therefore be criticised for allowing states to evade any potential blame and responsibility to make amends for their actions. Indeed, a significant criticism offered by scholars sympathetic to the challenges faced by post-colonial states is that the R2P serves the interests of former colonial powers by placing too much responsibility on post-colonial and developing states for situations which are often the result of their former occupier (Chandler, 2016, p. 48; Getachew, 2019, p. 236; Whyte, 2017, p. 317). The R2P allows the West/Global North to evade responsibility for their actions, especially when it comes to 'its previous crimes and its role in the failures of former colonies' (Whyte, 2017, p. 317). Such suspicions expose the 'legitimacy gap' (Peak, 2025, p. 4) at the heart of atrocity prevention: those states implicated in engendering precarity are also those less trusted to remedy it. Beyond the R2P, any effort at atrocity prevention which fails to reckon with this injustice is likely to reproduce its deficiencies.

1.2. Research Questions

As the primary purpose of this thesis is to establish whether the R-r2p provides a compelling solution to the research puzzle identified above, this thesis' central, opening research question is:

RQ1: Does the principle of reparation for colonial injustice offer a sound basis for attributing a special responsibility to protect to the UK?

Providing an answer to this question requires not only assessing how responsibilities might stem from injustice, but also what they are and to whom they are owed. As such, the thesis also addresses the following sub-questions:

RQ2: Why and in what ways was British colonialism unjust?

RQ3: Does the UK's unjust history of colonialism imbue a special responsibility to protect populations globally, to those in post-colonial states, or only to those in its former colonies?

RQ4: What responsibilities does the R-r2p generate?

RQ5: How can the UK best meet its R-r2p?

RQ2 is necessary in order to first ascertain the moral standards which should guide the R-r2p, while RQ3 helps to address whether the UK's special responsibility should be 'bilateral' or 'multilateral', to borrow Achiume's terms (2019, p. 1561) – that is, only to those in its own former colonies or all former colonies. Answering RQ2 and RQ3 is the primary focus of the first part of the thesis. Following this, the thesis then addresses RQ4 in order to determine the tools available under the R-r2p, before determining which responsibilities to prioritise given the limited resources available in

response to RQ5. In other words, the thesis asks of the R-r2p: “why?”, “to whom?”, and then, finally, “what?”, and “how?”.

1.3. Methodology: Concepts, Case Studies, and Definitions

1.3.1. Normativity: Ideal vs Non-Ideal Theory

In exploring how the UK’s colonial injustice is relevant to a special responsibility to protect, this thesis operates within the field of “normative ethics” – that is, concerned with ‘the study of goodness and of right action which aims to provide norms and principles that govern moral behaviour’ (Roussos, 2022, p. 866). More specifically, it might be thought of as an exercise in normative political theory since it focuses on the actions of states and political decision-makers, evaluates possible measures against these principles, and in turn suggests possible applications (Perez, 2025, pp. 4-5). In attempting to establish the necessary normative guidelines, this thesis operates somewhere between “ideal” and “non-ideal” theory. Ideal theory is best thought of as ‘utopian’, rejecting feasibility for the most part (Valentini, 2012, pp. 656-7) in favour of the pursuit of ‘the target towards which politics should ultimately aim’ (Favara, 2023, p. 380). Ideal theory might be challenged, however, because it often presents little practical guidance on how to achieve this. If the goal is to reckon with injustice, then this theoretical framework is best avoided; indeed, this thesis is in accord with Cesarano in arguing that ‘normative theory should have substantive practical value’ (2025, p. 2).

Non-ideal theory presents a better framework for the goals of this thesis, since its purpose is to find a means through which to move towards an ideal (Favara,

2023, p. 380). This theory accepts that proposals must be conscious of constraints and practicalities (Valentini, 2012, pp. 656-7). Non-ideal theory accepts these constraints, and is best understood as ‘a way of deciding what we should do here and now’ (McKenna, 2023, p. 24). At the same time, one must not accept constraints too readily, as to do so might result in an ‘uncritical defence of the *status quo*’ (Valentini, 2012, p. 659). Adopting either an ideal or non-ideal approach absolutely is likely to be deficient (Volacu, 2018, pp. 892-4), and conceiving of either of these theories as monoliths is inappropriate. It would instead be better to understand any approach as falling somewhere along a continuum with ideal theory at one end and non-ideal theory at the other (McKenna, 2023, p. 25; Valentini, 2012, p. 660).

In this light, the thesis might be understood as closer to the non-ideal end of the spectrum in that it acknowledges that pragmatic steps must be taken in order to prevent mass atrocities, and is conscious of the fact that there is only currently partial compliance in responding to such crises. In doing so, however, this thesis is also sensitive to, though not purely an exercise in, Mills’ notion of a ‘rectificatory ideal’, which is ‘what is ideally required to remedy past injustices’ (2009, p. 178). If the “ideal” is something to work towards through non-ideal proposals, then Mills argues that this ideal must be sensitive to injustice – all proposed measures should be assessed against whether they more closely approach rectification (2009, pp. 178-9). In other words, while the measures suggested in the second part of this thesis are focused on more comprehensively preventing mass atrocities, they are also assessed according to the extent which they remedy colonial injustice.

Even in making arguments in favour of the R-r2p, this thesis also accepts that often reparation must be pragmatic. While, as mentioned above, some hold that reparation entails the total loss of all unjustly gained benefits (Shelton, 2012, p. 97),

there is good reason to support a more pragmatic approach to reparation (as will be elaborated in Chapter 3). In other words, while proposals are measured against the “rectificatory ideal”, the thesis itself is rather an exercise in “rectificatory *non-ideal* theory”, recognising that complete reparation for historic injustices like colonialism is often unfeasible; or, as Mills puts it, ‘in most cases the original prediscrimination situation [...] cannot be restored’ (2009, p. 180). Centrally, this thesis understands reparation as entailing a responsibility to make the most reparation *broadly* even if at times this means abstaining from individual instances of reparation. There may also be instances where it would be prudent for the UK to engage in actions which do not fully align with what reparation demands (as will be explored in Chapter 4). In other words, while the R-r2p is certainly normative, it is also a fusion of reparation and pragmatism.

1.3.2. Colonialism: Why the UK?

Given that the allocation of reparative duties depends on the nature and scale of historic injustice, it is first necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by colonialism and why the UK is this thesis’ central case. Defining colonialism is no easy task – one of the only things that many colonialism scholars agree on, in fact, is that it is a slippery concept that escapes easy definition (Bufacchi, 2017, p. 202; Butt, 2012, p. 228; Collste, 2015, pp. 33-4). Thus far, this thesis has largely been using imperialism, colonialism, and empire interchangeably, though some scholars draw a distinction between these terms (Collste, 2015, pp. 33-4; Horvath, 1972, p. 47; Said, 1993, p. 9). Both Horvath (1972, p. 47) and Said (1993, p. 9), for instance, argue that colonialism is always the practice of what has been termed “settler colonialism”,

whereas imperialism does not require settling the land one exerts control over. Ypi, on the other hand, defines the former in a very similar way to how the others define the latter, making no reference to settlers: 'Colonialism is typically understood as a practice that involves both the subjugation of one people to another and the political and economic control of a dependent territory' (2013, p. 162). It might also be understood that all colonialism is imperialism, but not all imperialism is colonialism. As such, this thesis will continue to use the terms interchangeably, even if largely opting for the latter.

In their statistical analysis of legacies of colonial violence, Lange and Dawson offer first a basic definition of a colony as 'a territory that is controlled by a foreign power' beyond the traditional borders of the metropole (2009, p. 792), before going on to add four additional "clauses". Three of these clauses in particular have guided how this thesis has determined its case studies. The first clause demands that a territory must have been 'formally dominated by foreign powers', while the second requires a territory to have been 'controlled by foreign powers for at least 10 consecutive years' (Lange and Dawson, 2009, p. 792). While the former may be justified on the basis that the limits of informal colonialism and influence are insufficiently narrow, the latter is justified on the basis that fewer than 10 years is unlikely to have been sufficient time for colonialism to leave its structural legacies (Lange and Dawson, 2009, p. 792). Lange and Dawson's third clause limits the focus to countries 'in which the majority of the territory and population were under formal colonial rule' (2009, pp. 792-3). As with the above clauses, this clause helps to strengthen Lange and Dawson's definition since it narrows the scope of analysis to those states likely to have been most affected by colonialism.

Colonialism is, then, the process of formal domination (Butt, 2012, p. 237; Horvath, 1972, p. 46; Lange and Dawson, 2009, pp. 792-3; Renzo, 2019, p. 350; Said, 1993, p. 9), control, and exploitation of a territory by an external power that lasts for some time (Lange and Dawson's minimum of 10 years seems reasonable). But such a definition is also lacking in that it provides no real guidance as to what "type" of colonialism is pertinent to responsibilities today, both temporally and geographically. Collste, for instance, writes that colonialism could refer to as disparate projects as 'the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Soviet Empire' (2015, pp. 33-4). As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the novelty and severity of European colonialism make it particularly consequential. The scale of European colonialism is certainly undeniable, given that 'by 1900 colonial rule had already been imposed on 90 percent of Africa, more than half of Asia and almost the totality of the South Pacific' (Macqueen, 2007, p. 24) predominantly by European powers (and, in a few cases, the US). These are but some of the consequences of what Bernhard et al term 'Western overseas colonialism' (2004, p. 227).

The UK is the primary focus of this thesis primarily due to the size of its empire and the legacies of its rule, though the R-r2p developed by this thesis could also be applied to other former Western colonial powers (especially France, given its position on the UNSC). The consequences of British rule include (but are not limited to): economic disadvantages such as income inequality (Acemoglu et al., 2001, p. 1395), barriers to growth (Boahen, 1987, p. 103; Gegout, 2018, p. 25), and underdevelopment (Moore, 2016, p. 456); problematic artificial borders (Alesina et al., 2011, p. 248; Boahen, 1987, pp. 95-6; De Juan and Pierskalla, 2017, p. 161); entrenched ethnic identities (Phillips, 2019, p. 148); and 'impediments to

democratization' (Mamdani, 2018, p. 25). These will be elaborated on further in Chapter 2. The benefits of British colonialism for the UK should also be clear, given its material wealth and, as Rotmann et al. suggest, its position on the P5 (2014, p. 371). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that, according to Jackson, its 'size and globality was a unique feature' (2013, p. 14). Further to this, the UK has been selected as the primary focus of this thesis because of its historical commitment to atrocity prevention (Gifkins, Jarvis, and Ralph, 2019, pp. 1356-7; International Development Committee, 2022, p. 12; UNA-UK, 2018).

Given the expansive nature of the British Empire, spanning almost half a millennium, the thesis focuses only on those states colonised under what Hyam terms 'Britain's imperial century', that is, the period of substantial expansion from 1815-1914 (Hyam, 2002). Within this timeframe, scholars have identified the Sepoy rebellion in India in 1857, and the final third of the 19th century as periods where colonialism was reinvigorated globally (Cypher and Dietz, 2009, p. 95; Gildea, 2019, p. 25). As such, while this thesis adopts the 1815-1914 timeframe as its initial formal temporal focus since this period captures the UK's main era of imperial expansion, these later landmarks identified by scholars help to highlight when the most direct and institutionally consequential forms of colonial rule and injustice occurred. In pursuit of this rapacious grab for territory, the UK also engendered the most enduring legacies of its rule through novel forms of administration, as will be explored further in the following chapter.

1.3.3. Case Studies

Each of the case studies selected for this thesis fits a modified version of the criteria discussed by Lange and Dawson (2009, pp. 792-3) as well as meeting the chronology requirements outlined above. In addition, a further requirement that each was that each state under consideration is (or has recently) experienced mass atrocities. Given that the focus of this thesis is how best to allocate a responsibility to protect in former colonies (and how best to operationalise this), it makes sense to consider those most immediately at risk. To summarise, the criteria for selecting cases (adapted from Lange and Dawson) were as follows:

- The state was at one time a colony of the British Empire
- Each state was controlled by the British for longer than 10 years
- Each was controlled by the UK for the most part
- Each state was colonised (for the most part) between 1815 and 1914
- Each state is currently either experiencing mass atrocities or is at imminent risk of doing so

States which have *links* with British colonialism but where liability for contemporary crises might be limited can be excluded on these principles. For instance, the third criterion means that states such as Cameroon or Yemen, while both experiencing crises (GCR2P, 2026i), must be excluded. Cameroon was not entirely colonised by the UK but also by France (though the link between this mixed colonisation and violence against Anglophones in the state today is worth exploring), and in Yemen the British only formally colonised Aden and the areas in its immediate proximity. While the criteria above mean that these states are not the *primary* case studies of this thesis, this does not mean that they are not referred to at all, nor that

the UK has no responsibility to populations in these states. The thesis focuses on case studies which best exemplify the criteria, however, as it is prudent to discover whether a special responsibility to protect can be allocated first in states where the imperial link is strongest.

The states which best fit this endeavour are Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria. The four states are not only all currently experiencing ongoing mass atrocities according to both the GCR2P and the EWP (GCR2P, 2026i; EWP, 2026) but have been experiencing heightened levels of insecurity for more than a decade. Indeed, each state has been highlighted in the GCR2P's weekly "atrocities alert" briefings – in which the NGO draws attention to three specific crises – a number of times. Out of the 487 atrocity alerts that the GCR2P has released in the past 10 years (as of 17/06/2026), Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria have featured 142 times (29.2%), 89 times (18.3%), 78 times (16.0%), and 59 times (12.1%) respectively since the series began. The next most frequently mentioned state which also meets the criteria outlined above is Sri Lanka, with 5 (1.0%). Within this selection of states, it is also worth pointing out that there are, though accepting some overlap, three broadly different types of atrocity scenarios – state-led (Myanmar), civil (Sudan and South Sudan), and non-state (Nigeria). It is worth briefly outlining each of the current crises facing these states.

Myanmar (formerly Burma), as it is known today, was formally colonised by the British in 1885, though parts of its territory had been conquered as early as 1824. Myanmar today faces one of the most severe humanitarian crises which, as shall soon be explored, has been linked to the colonial era. Centrally, the humanitarian crisis is a result of the crimes perpetrated by the military (GCR2P, 2026a). At particular risk of these crimes are ethnic groups which are perceived to be seditious

towards the ruling military junta, including the Karen and Kachin (GCR2P, 2026a). As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the worst crimes are being perpetrated against the Rohingya in Rakhine State (formerly Arakan), where a process of ethnic cleansing has been underway since 2017 (GCR2P, 2026a). The 'history of institutionalized persecution and discrimination against ethnic minority groups' has been listed as key risk in the recurrence of mass atrocities (GCR2P, 2026a).

Although Sudan and South Sudan today are distinct sovereign states (since 2011), the two were ruled as one in the colonial era and as such will be referred to as either colonial Sudan or simply Sudan when the territory is explored in historical perspective. The colonial state was initially established as Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1899, and as such was administered by the Foreign Office in the UK and not the Colonial Office. While this might suggest that Egypt should also be held responsible for any negative legacies associated with the colonial era, it is clear that colonial Sudan was a joint endeavour in name only, since the UK also dominated Egypt (Massoud, 2013, p. 53; Wise, 2020, p. 138) and Egypt was excluded from administration of the territory (Sharkey, 2003, p. 6). Conflict between the north and south of the former colony dominated much of its history but has quietened since the independence of South Sudan. Populations in both states, though, are still experiencing mass atrocity crimes. In South Sudan, for instance, the fragmentation of ethnicity and conflict over resources and political appointments – many of which have their foundations in the past – has precipitated identity-based violence (GCR2P, 2026c). Sudan, on the other hand, has been experiencing heightened civil conflict since early 2023. Both the government Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the rebel Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have perpetrated atrocities (GCR2P, 2026d). Non-Arab groups are in a particularly precarious position, having suffered various

acts of atrocity at the hands of Arab groups (GCR2P, 2026d). This discrimination also has historical roots in the colonial era (GCR2P, 2026d). The failure of local authorities to prevent identity-based violence has also been linked to a lack of capacity (GCR2P, 2026c).

Like Myanmar, Nigeria was colonised piecemeal. Lagos was initially annexed in 1861 and later incorporated in the Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1906. The Southern Nigeria Protectorate and Northern Nigeria Protectorate were amalgamated in 1914, establishing the borders of Nigeria that still exist today. As in Myanmar, South Sudan, and Sudan, populations in Nigeria are currently at risk of identity-based violence (GCR2P, 2026b). Such violence is largely perpetrated by bandits and other armed groups, including Boko Haram, but the state security apparatus has also been criticised for its propensity to use excessive force (GCR2P, 2026b). Mass atrocity crimes in Nigeria are incentivised by economic deprivation and a lack of resources, and are difficult to prevent because the state lacks the capacity to deal with several insurgencies and armed conflicts simultaneously (GCR2P, 2026b).

In investigating whether (and in what way) each of these case studies generate special responsibilities for the UK, it is necessary to explore the nature and scope of colonialism in regard to each one. To achieve this, there will be some reference to historical data and primary texts. Given the emphasis, however, on the *legacies* of colonialism rather than solely the colonial era itself, much weight will be given to secondary literature, especially that which aims to use data to test the validity of concepts such as path dependency theory (Mahoney and Schensul, 2006, p. 457) and accumulated disadvantage.

1.3.4. Reparation

The principle of reparation is slippery, and its very meaning has been subject to debate (McGary, 2010, p. 547). At its most vague, De Greiff writes that the purpose of reparation is ‘to do justice to victims’ (2006, p. 455), whereas Tan argues that it may best be understood generally as meaning ‘accepting responsibility for a wrong and adopting some appropriate measure in response to this wrong’ (2008, p. 456). The “appropriate measure” will of course often need to be defined on an ad hoc basis, and there is therefore no one particular form of reparation; however, for the sake of this thesis, it will be best to understand reparation as the ‘rough principle that asserts that those who cause harm, and especially unjustified harm, bear a special obligation to make amends for it’ (Souter, 2022, p. 44).

While reparation has been popularly understood as purely monetary (Torpey, 2003, p. 3), this has been labelled by Brennan as a myth (2012, pp. 203-4). Indeed, though this thesis is adopting the broad definition of reparation outlined above (and will be elaborated on further in Chapter 3), it is also more specifically concerned with the principles of “compensation” and “satisfaction” as outlined by the UN in 2005, alongside the principle of “non-repetition” (UNGA, 2005b, pp. 7-8). In other words, this thesis is concerned with whether specific measures can compensate for injustice through a ‘monetary or material good’ (Souter, 2022, p. 12), provide “satisfaction” through symbolic ‘acknowledgement’ of harm (Souter, 2022, p. 45), and guarantee non-repetition by abstaining from the reproduction of colonial modes of domination. Although there *is* a difference between restitution, compensation, and satisfaction, this thesis is broadly using both reparation and rectification as umbrella terms for each and all of these measures.

1.3.5. Concepts and Definitions: R2P and Atrocity Prevention

This thesis will at various times use the linked, but not synonymous, terms of the R2P, the R-r2p, a responsibility to protect, and atrocity prevention. At other times, this thesis also broadly refers to the protection of vulnerable populations. It is worth providing some clarification as to how each of these terms will be used. The R2P, specifically referring to the norm first adopted in 2005 and reaffirmed by members of the UNGA in 2021 (UNGA, 2021b, p. 1), will only ever be used in acronym form. The R2P is much more clearly defined than the other terms this thesis uses, and has a strict three-pillar model as supported by states following the release of the first report on the norm released by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) in 2009 (UNGA, 2009b). As seen above, one of the main flaws of this model is that research has tended to focus primarily on the third pillar only, especially the military intervention located therein, even though the pillar does contain non-coercive tools also (Thakur, 2016, p. 425). Peak has suggested greater clarity might be provided here by moving towards a four-pillar model, separating use of coercive force into its own pillar (2024, p. 4), though even then there is some ambiguity as to which measures fall under each of the remaining three pillars (Bellamy, 2015, p. 55). This is especially problematic if a strict sequencing of the pillars is ensured, as China has advocated for in its proposed Responsible Protection (RP) initiative (Garwood-Gowers, 2016, pp. 106-7), even though others have argued that the pillars overlap intentionally (Bellamy, 2015, p. 14). This haziness is one of the reasons that the thesis eschews framing the UK's responsibility *exclusively* through the R2P.

Alongside the R2P, it is common for both practitioners and academics to use the more general term of (mass) “atrocity prevention” (Straus, 2015, p. 17). Indeed, Bellamy suggests that this has become the “fashionable” alternative to the R2P (2023). Agreement on the precise boundaries and limits of atrocity prevention are subject to debate in the same way that those of the R2P are (Rosenberg et al., 2015, p. 10), with academics largely avoiding providing an explicit definition of the term. As such, it is easy for definitions of the term to fall into easy tautologies – mass atrocity prevention is anything that is done to prevent mass atrocities, specifically the four mass atrocity crimes included under the banner of the R2P. Though one might understand “prevention” as only meaning stopping mass atrocities from happening before they ever occur, this thesis interprets it to also mean response to ongoing crises in order to “prevent” the continuation of atrocities. In contrast, measures whose purpose is specifically to stop atrocities from ever occurring will be referred to as “preventive measures”. The conceptual value of atrocity prevention lies not exactly in its definition, but in how its definition differs to that of other associated norms. Whereas the R2P, for instance, has a relatively precise definition (though this too is subject to contestation, as will be discussed in Chapter 6), mass atrocity prevention might be thought of as an ‘umbrella’ concept (Straus, 2015, p. 27). In largely adopting this term alongside the R-2p, this thesis seeks to move beyond the confines of the R2P, a move that both Bellamy (2014, p. 183) and Ralph (2025, p. 459) suggest might be pragmatic given that the language of the latter can be an obstacle to achieving its goals.

Despite this, the thesis engages with the language and literature of the R2P throughout, largely because the R2P *is* the predominant norm of atrocity prevention. In engaging with the theoretical debates of the R2P, a justification is provided both

for why the R-r2p is necessary and how it differs from the more established norm. Centrally, this thesis makes the argument that the R2P is narrower than is necessary for an approach to be truly reparative. For instance (as will be explored further in Chapter 5) there is much debate in the literature as to the scope of prevention under the R2P (for an overview of the debate see: Gallagher, 2022); a dogged attachment to making reparation through the R2P as is risks failing those to whom injustice has been done, while attempting to change the R2P to accommodate reparation generally risks confusing further the meaning of the norm. As such, while this thesis refers to the R2P at times as the primary norm of humanitarian protection, it follows Ralph in supporting its goals *in principle* if not *in practice* (2025, p. 460). As such, it conceives of the UK's responsibility in lowercase: that is, a "responsibility to protect" detached from the R2P itself whereby the UK meets the spirit of the norm, even if not adhering to the letter of it. The language of "responsibility" is not excised under this new model, but *heightened* under the R-r2p.

1.4. Arguments and Contributions

The central argument of this thesis is that the UK has a special reparations-based responsibility to protect populations in its former colonies (and beyond) *because* of the injustice it perpetrated throughout and following the colonial era. More specifically, it argues that the British state engendered a legacy of identity-based violence across its imperial territories, as well as contributing to the establishment of an international system that continues to put former colonies at a disadvantage. Since it is not only its own former colonies which suffer from the international architecture it helped to create, but all post-colonial states, this thesis

holds that the UK has a special, though weaker, reparations-based responsibility towards these states also. At the same time, the UK continues to enjoy many of the benefits of its colonial exploitation – as evidenced in part by its economic capacity and privileged position in international politics (Jackson, 2013, p. 114) – even with its decline. Further to the above responsibilities, this thesis also makes the case that the UK has a heightened responsibility to use its capacity for protection more generally. As such, although the UK's foremost responsibilities are bilateral – that is, to its own former colonies – it must also go beyond this once those responsibilities have been met. A further novel contribution of this thesis lies not merely in combining backward-looking and forward-looking grounds of special responsibility, but in showing how they are historically intertwined: the UK's present capacity to protect stems in part from the same colonial injustice that grounds its reparative responsibility.

In order to answer the puzzle at the heart of this work as to who ought to be responsible for mass atrocities occurring in post-colonial states, this thesis also makes the argument that such responsibilities must be sensitive to the *type* of injustice. In other words, while the legacies of British colonialism mean that the UK *has* responsibilities, the way in which the state conducted its colonial affairs affects how such responsibilities should be met. This thesis sets out several guiding principles on which such responsibilities should be defined. These will be justified in greater depth in Chapter 3, but are as follows:

- *Reparative Grounding*: the duty can be assigned on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice
- *Non-domination*: the duty will not reproduce colonial modes of domination
- *Agency*: the duty empowers populations facing said action and fosters local ownership

- *Reparative Effectiveness*: the duty is likely to repair the situation (the specific mass atrocity scenario) by addressing colonial harm(s)
- *Sustainability*: in meeting the above principles, the duty will, on balance, not pose too significant an obstacle to future efforts to make reparation *or* prevent atrocities

These guiding principles are at the heart of this thesis' novel framework of the R-r2p. Given the scale of British colonial injustice, most measures in the atrocity prevention toolkit can be assigned to the UK on the basis of reparation, though many (such as humanitarian intervention and other violent means, for example) would be best avoided, as will be demonstrated over the course of the second part of this thesis.

The principle of agency is particularly relevant to this guiding framework. Under British colonialism, in all its misguided paternalism (Jackson, 2013, p. 55) and exploitation, subjugated inhabitants of its territories were assumed to be incapable of self-determination and in need of "civilising". As such, little opportunity to demonstrate agency was offered. In that these populations were denied agency, either directly or indirectly, during the colonial period and beyond, the restoration of agency must be treated as a central concern of the R-r2p even if it should not be held absolutely sacred. This does not merely mean "giving" agency to supposed passive recipients, but, more importantly, that the UK should help to empower those already actively striving for their own protection. Agency is also important for the R-r2p given its relevance to the likely success of any measure of atrocity prevention.

There are several potential benefits to adopting this framework. As set out previously, there is no shortage of mass atrocity crises around the world; yet, at the same time, there is certainly a scarcity of states which are willing to provide the

necessary assistance (Stensrud and Mennecke, 2024, p. 438). While there are of course good reasons to be cautious about the R-r2p since any accusations of blame for mass atrocities could lead the UK to be defensive (Young, 2011, p. 179), it is also possible that it might increase the incentive to act by tapping into a sense of responsibility (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 95; Miller, 2007, p. 269; Tan, 2007, p. 286), though this would likely depend on how the responsibility is invoked. Beyond providing an incentive for – and possible justification of – the UK to adopt a special responsibility to respond to crises in its own former colonies, this framework is also sensitive to accusations of neo-coloniality in the pursuit of humanitarian goals. By putting atonement for colonial injustice at the heart of the R-r2p, the UK might not only decrease the likelihood that its *own* attempts to protect vulnerable populations are the subject of distrust, but also those of others too. Further to this, if protection can be provided in a truly reparative way and trust can be rebuilt, then the whole endeavour of humanitarian protection might make progress. In other words, the R-r2p mitigates some of the current challenges facing atrocity prevention and in turn provides new avenues through which protection might be offered. As such, this thesis reframes the argument that R2P and atrocity prevention are dead because they are neo-colonial.

The final potential benefits of the R-r2p are those which might accrue to the UK. Using ill-gotten advantages to at least try to compensate victims might help to repair relationships and reconcile groups, a key goal of ‘restorative justice’, as used by Walker (2006a, p. 213). Central to this is the rebuilding of trust (Walker, 2006a, p. 227), a goal which is especially relevant to R2P given the challenges explored above – especially the implementation of immediate means of protection through the UNSC (Gallagher and Wheeler, 2021, p. 190). Many have noted that the building of positive

relationships is one of the main purposes of reparations generally (von Platz and Reidy, 2006, p. 361; Wenar, 2006, p. 403). Both Hamber (2007, p. 265) and Satz (2007, p. 185) go further by arguing that this is the single most important goal of reparations. Through the R-r2p, with time, the UK might establish 'relations characterized by equality, reciprocity, and respect' (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5).

Importantly, the purpose of this thesis is not to make the case that a new approach to atrocity prevention could be the full scope of reparation. The full weight of the task of reparation for colonial injustice is far beyond both the scope of this thesis and the R-r2p alone. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to ask how reparation might inform the UK's approach to atrocity prevention.

1.5. Thesis Structure

The thesis is split into two distinct but naturally sequential parts. Part I (Chapters 2 and 3) concerns how the UK's unjust colonial past (and the ways this past endures or is perpetuated) generates a special responsibility to protect its former colonies from mass atrocity crimes. This section provides the conceptual foundation for all that follows, answering RQ2 ("Why and in what ways was British colonialism unjust?") and RQ3 ("Does the UK's unjust history of colonialism imbue a special responsibility to protect globally, or post-colonial states, or only its former colonies?"). In doing this, it is possible to establish the guiding principles against which potential actions to be included in the R-r2p might be measured. Having established this foundation, Part II (Chapters 4-6) addresses RQ4 ("What responsibilities does the R-r2p generate?"). It sets out these actions beginning with the most immediate and moving towards the most indirect and long-term: that is,

moving from “downstream” tools to “upstream” tools. Accordingly, Part II considers the reparative potential of military intervention and the protection of refugees, capacity-building and development, and diplomacy and norm-brokering in turn. The sequencing of this half is intentional, as it allows first a demonstration of responsibilities which it might be problematic to include within the R-r2p before then offering a path for how the UK can make reparation and (re)establish itself as a ‘good international citizen’ (Souter, 2016, p. 798). In doing this, the thesis thereby answers RQ5 (“How can the UK best meet its R-r2p?”).

In order to first establish a justification for the R-r2p, Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the conduct and legacies of British colonialism as they relate to the occurrence of mass atrocities today. After starting with a general overview of the injustices of Western colonialism and British colonialism broadly, the chapter then examines how such misconduct has helped to create the conditions that allowed the ongoing crises in this thesis’ chosen case studies of Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria. With reference to these cases, this chapter first demonstrates how the economic policy of colonial administrators prioritising profit through exploitation has engendered lasting inequality. Second, this chapter highlights how the rigid codification of racial, ethnic, and religious identities served to entrench identity-based violence and achieve the British strategy of “divide and rule”. This section also emphasises the role that the UK’s patchwork application of direct and indirect rule played in generating distrust. Finally, the third section of this chapter explores how the authoritarian nature of British colonialism inhibited the growth of strong institutions and often encouraged the rise of the so-called “strongman” in many post-independence governments.

If the purpose of Chapter 2 is to establish the scale and nature of injustice that was British colonialism, then Chapter 3 aims to answer how the responsibilities demanded by such an injustice might be in part met by a new approach to the protection of vulnerable populations. The chapter begins by first offering an exploration of different models of allocating special responsibilities (and their potential flaws), before providing a definition of the type of reparation that an injustice like colonialism demands. Following this, a justification for contemporary responsibility for what might be perceived as a “historic” injustice is provided, with an emphasis on British colonialism and its legacies as enduring. After a rationale for a reparations-based model of allocating duties is offered, the chapter then engages with the potential reparative function of the R-r2p and asks to whom exactly reparative obligations are owed. Finally, the chapter outlines the principles that should guide the UK’s attempts to make reparation via the R-r2p, providing the foundation for the second part of the thesis.

Chapter 4 concerns how the UK might best meet the demands of immediate protection under the R-r2p without doing harm to the whole reparative project. The chapter begins by exploring whether the UK can ever be morally justified in conducting a military intervention that is unauthorised by the UNSC in order to protect vulnerable populations. While such a measure is dismissed as unlikely to be appropriate for the R-r2p, this chapter also considers whether any military measures can serve a reparative function, especially those which are either coercive, but with UNSC permission, or those carried out in cooperation with the state. As well as intervention, this chapter considers cooperation in terms of weapon transfers (and other forms of support) to vulnerable groups. In drawing an end to the discussion of use of force, this chapter explores whether so-called “safe zones” or other types of

“defensive” force provide a comparatively less non-ideal alternative than intervention in the traditional sense. While acknowledging that military means could offer some protection to vulnerable populations, this chapter dismisses such means as non-ideal to an extent that makes pursuing them undesirable. As an alternative to such measures, this chapter argues that the UK’s finite resources would be better spent on providing a more robust and comprehensive approach to the protection of refugees.

Following this discussion of immediate means of protection, Chapter 5 turns instead to how such crises might be prevented before they (re)occur with a focus on capacity-building and development. The chapter begins with a justification for a broader definition of “prevention” to include development under the R-r2p in contrast to scholars who wish to retain a relatively minimalist approach (for example: Gallagher, 2022, p. 1020; Mani and Weiss, 2011, p. 4). Continuing the upstream trend of this thesis, this chapter moves from the most immediate and direct means of “prevention” to those which are long-term and indirect. As such, this chapter begins with an exploration of the most reactive form of non-violent preventive assistance in the form of humanitarian aid before then moving on to assess the need for a broader responsibility to rebuild. This chapter understands both measures as necessary under the R-r2p, but also argues that development assistance must be provided even when its most immediate goal is not the prevention of mass atrocities – a return of resources is owed regardless, and prevention might still be an outcome even if not explicitly intended. Finally, this chapter argues that efforts to democratise deserve a place under the R-r2p insofar as they serve to empower local populations and safeguard agency.

Chapter 6 is primarily concerned with the role that diplomacy might play in the UK's R-r2p, beginning first with a discussion of the reparative potential of diplomatic criticism and spotlighting. Following this, the chapter highlights that the R2P persists as the (pre)dominant norm in international debates over the protection of vulnerable populations from mass atrocities. While its persistence is admirable, however, it remains under contestation and is thus under-operationalised. Given the necessity for consensus in order to more fully protect vulnerable populations, this chapter puts forward three models through which the UK might help to strengthen, clarify, and potentially reform the norm, namely: the "UK as Leader", the "UK as Abdicant", and the "UK as Advocate". While the first two models are dismissed as likely to give credence to accusations of (neo)coloniality and inappropriate given the current architecture of the international system respectively, the last model is understood as occupying a pragmatic middle ground. This chapter advances the "UK as Advocate" model as the most appropriate means through which the state might serve to make reparation, by empowering those states to which it has done (colonial) injustice and (re)building relationships characterised by mutual respect.

Chapter 7 draws each of these measures together and posits how the potential benefits of a comprehensive commitment to the R-r2p are fourfold in that it is likely to help: those who are victims of the UK's colonial injustice, populations vulnerable to mass atrocity crimes, the legitimacy of the R2P and its associated principles, and (instrumentally) the image of the UK itself (Collste, 2015, p. 15). In doing so, this chapter concludes by once more concisely answering each research question and discussing the associated implications, as well as briefly outlining what moves to adopt the R-r2p might be reasonably expected of the UK, practically speaking. Finally, possible avenues for future research will be considered.

PART I

2. British Colonialism: Enduring Legacies and Contemporary Atrocity Risk

After centuries of formal colonialism, the British Empire largely came to an end in the early 1960s; any optimism associated with the freedom of independence, however, often proved short-lived. The consequences of colonial rule quickly became apparent for populations across many of its former territories. In Nigeria, for instance, separatist movements stemming from tensions exacerbated by an inadequate process of decolonisation by the UK resulted in the Biafran genocide just seven years later (Heerten and Moses, 2018, p. 6; Smith, 2025, pp. 84-5). Nigeria is but one state to experience such a crisis in the aftermath of formal decolonisation and, like many others, continues to reckon with the consequences of colonialism today. Such consequences represent an enduring structural legacy.⁶ In the process of shaping the modern world for its political and economic benefit (Acharya, 2022, p. 24; Bell, 2019, p. 3), colonial powers also engendered a vulnerability to civil conflicts (Brendon, 2007; Lange and Dawson, 2009, p. 785), economic disadvantages (Acemoglu et al., 2001, p. 1395; Moore, 2016, p. 456), and a weak institutional legacy that gave rise to authoritarianism (Mamdani, 2018, p. 25; Young, 1994, p. 244). Understanding how these legacies were produced is essential. It provides the context for fully comprehending the risks faced by states such as Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria, and helps to establish the necessary foundation for later discussions of the UK's potential responsibilities under the R-r2p.

⁶ While this chapter is largely concerned with tracing the legacies of *historical* colonial injustice, Chapter 3 will also consider in what ways these structural consequences persist due to *ongoing* coloniality.

The focus of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive empirical test of the validity of all of these claims, nor does it treat colonialism as a monocausal explanation. Rather, its purpose is more narrowly to identify where, when, and how these consequences have come to be in states which were once governed under the banner of the British Empire specifically in the context of the mass atrocities perpetrated in many such states. Scholars whose work is primarily concerned with atrocity prevention have identified the link between colonial rule and susceptibility to contemporary mass atrocities (Bellamy, 2014, p. 29; Glanville, 2021, pp. 94-5), but the causal links are more often noted rather than traced. This chapter aims to address such a lacuna by identifying key mechanisms through which British colonial governance created enduring economic, social, political, and institutional consequences – all of which continue to shape atrocity risk today – with a particular focus on *how* colonial officials administered their territories. In evidencing this, the analysis centres on three features of British rule that recur across each of the case studies and beyond: economic misdevelopment and exploitation, the politicisation and reification of identity categories, and the construction of fragile institutions that helped to entrench authoritarian modes of rule. This chapter provides the empirical and historical foundation necessary for the exploration of the R-r2p that will follow in Chapter 3.

It is necessary to establish not only whether these legacies exist specifically for the UK and not just “colonialism” generally, but also to draw on tangible examples of how, where, and when these legacies were established. While some reference will be made to British colonialism *in general*, it is necessary to narrow the focus slightly further. As explained in Sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3, particular attention will be paid to colonial conduct after the Sepoy rebellion in India in 1857 (a watershed moment in

the British Empire) and after 1880, which Gildea notes as the beginning of so-called formal empire due to emphasis on occupation and administration of vast swathes of territory (2019, p. 25). Furthermore, specific reference will be made to four present-day states (treated as three colonial cases, with Sudan and South Sudan ruled jointly): Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and South Sudan.⁷ All of these states were fully colonised by the British after 1880 and continue to reckon with the legacies of British colonialism. Each of these states has been identified by the GCR2P as either experiencing ongoing mass atrocity crimes or as at risk. While an overview of British colonialism can provide some insight into reparative responsibilities generally speaking, a focus on each of these four cases helps to establish British responsibilities on a clearer relational basis. In discussing each of these cases some parameters for the content of reparative responsibilities will be drawn out, though a full exploration of such duties will be offered later in the thesis (see Chapter 3).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First, in order to situate the legacies detailed in later sections of the chapter, Section 2.1 provides some clarification as to the nature of British colonialism, both in terms of how it was administered and the rationale for doing so. This section provides an insight into the supposed Millsian paternalistic liberal principles guiding the British Empire (Mehta, 1999, p. 88), as well as the mixed application of both direct and indirect rule at the heart of colonial administration. This chapter suggests that the “ideals” that guided British rule were often merely a pretence, and the “goods” it aimed to implement either misguided or under-delivered, as demonstrated through the remaining three sections of the chapter. The chapter turns to an examination of economic policy under British rule

⁷ The name’s Myanmar and Burma will be used interchangeably, though the former will be largely used in contemporary discussions, with the latter being the dominant term used in historical focus.

(Section 2.2), arguing that economic exploitation was at the heart of the empire, not the development of its colonies. In particular, the prioritisation of economic gain for the metropole over the improvement of the lives of the colonised and uneven development are understood as having had a lasting impact on susceptibility to mass atrocities.

Following this discussion, this chapter argues that the divide and rule tactics inherent to British administration served to entrench racial, ethnic, and religious divides (Section 2.3). In administering new states later consolidated under artificial borders, the British administrators aimed to stem dissent by discouraging solidarity between ethnic groups and hardening identities through administrative categorisation, favouring those who demonstrated loyalty (often on the peripheries) while often punishing those most able to challenge colonial rule (often in the core). Such ethnic tensions did not disappear upon independence, but rather continue to shape mass atrocities today. The final section of the chapter concerns the authoritarian nature of British colonialism which inhibited the growth of strong institutions. Section 2.4 argues that in its efforts to quell growing nationalist movements, the British administrators often chose to enforce peace through violence, and instilled a tendency towards authoritarian rule in those who, for the most part, inherited the colonial system after independence. This willingness to choose violence in the face of separatism has incentivised mass atrocities as a mode of rule. These legacies do not act in isolation, but rather become highly dangerous in combination.

Before beginning, it is necessary to add an important caveat to the analysis of this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is not to lay the entirety of the blame for the challenges facing these states today – nor the mass atrocities that occur as a result

of them – at the UK's feet. Solely blaming the UK is unfair both to the UK (since it allows the actions of post-colonial leaders to evade scrutiny) and to the populations living in former colonies, since doing so assumes a paternalistic view reminiscent of those held by colonial administrators that populations living in these territories are unable to govern themselves. While it seems intuitively true that the populations in these former colonies should have rectified the legacies left by colonialism, in many cases these states have been dominated by a small, elite section of society, and as such the people have had little say in erasing these barriers. It is also worth querying to what extent it is reasonable to expect formerly colonised peoples to be able to overcome some colonial legacies – especially economic ones – given that many barriers to doing so are global in nature, not merely local to the post-colonial state itself. Finally, just because others have a responsibility to overcome such negative legacies and to not perpetrate mass atrocities does not entirely free the UK of its reparative obligations. As such, even with these caveats, the UK bears a heightened reparative responsibility where policies employed in the administration of its empire created or reinforced structures which continue to shape contemporary mass atrocity risk.

2.1. The Nature of British Colonialism

In order to ascertain the responsibilities stemming from British colonialism, it is useful first to define *what* it was and *why* it was conducted. While British colonialism was conducted in various ways across both time and space, there are some shared elements it is worth drawing out. Doing so will not only help us to understand and connect British conduct in specific colonies to its wider behaviour –

and thus its responsibilities – but is especially useful when it comes to understanding what the non-repetition aspect of reparation entails. It will also provide clarification as to why British colonialism was not, to use Ferguson’s words, a ‘good thing’ for the world (2003, xxi). While it is possible to claim that British colonialism brought about some tangible benefits, other scholars have made clear that the “balance sheet” of colonialism is far more negative than positive (Brendon, 2007; Jackson, 2013, p. 121). Such an argument can also be criticised for its myopic focus on benefits and disadvantages (“the what”) rather than *how* such legacies were conferred (“the how”). Even the “what” might be challenged on the basis that what might be understood as “benefits” by colonial administrators and contemporary apologists might not have been understood as such by those on the receiving end. Ferguson, for instance, cites the spread of the English language as a benefit (2003, xxvii), even when this meant the eradication of indigenous languages (Phillipson, 2013, p. 1). In other words, even purportedly “positive” features of British colonialism were enforced in such a way as to still generate reparative responsibilities.

It might be thought to be unfair to claim that colonialism was a purely exploitative endeavour at its core; rather, a belief in paternalism and progress was often offered a core justification for the Empire, especially throughout the 19th century (Mehta, 1999, p. 18). This belief intensified as the British state itself became increasingly liberal domestically (Jackson, 2013, p. 55). In this sense, the positive intentions of colonial administrators were likely reaching their peak precisely in the period from the end of the 19th century until the end of formal decolonisation in the 1960s. The idea that such administrators had good intentions might be seen to at least mitigate the many crimes of colonialism, suggesting its consequences were unintended, though there are many good reasons to be wary of this argument. The

claim that benign intentions mitigate colonial harms faces several challenges. The first such challenge relates to how these “liberal tendencies” were brought to fruition. Often, these ideals would be enforced by any means necessary, including through brutal violence (Barkawi and Brighton, 2013, p. 1121; Brendon, 2007; Elkins, 2022, p. 13; Levine, 2013, p. 123). Likewise, though those sympathetic to the British Empire claim, at least, that its rule brought about a Pax Britannica (Ferguson, 2003, p. 366) – that is, a novel peace in formerly warring areas – even this was achieved only through subjugation. Mehta suggests that such methods reflect an ‘underlying awareness of the capacity to direct, and if need be, coerce’ subject populations to achieve liberal ends (1999, p. 11).

The second challenge is that, regardless of the intentions, such ideals were implemented without consulting local populations. This is unsurprising, given that colonialism is a practice defined by domination (Butt, 2012, p. 237; Horvath, 1972, p. 46; Lange and Dawson, 2009, pp. 792-3; Renzo, 2019, p. 350; Said, 1993, p. 9) and the denial of sovereignty (Boahen, 1987, p. 100; Moore, 2016, p. 457), based upon unequal relations between external invaders and indigenous peoples (Bufacchi, 2017, p. 207; Ypi, 2013, p. 158). Despite this, one could argue that such criticisms were at least *mitigated* under the British, since they often governed through indirect rule, which has been referred to as a central feature of the British Empire (Ali et al., 2018, pp. 1048-9; Macqueen, 2007, p. 73). Indeed, indirect rule concerns transferring administrative powers to local elites rather than the direct rule conducted almost solely by representatives of the metropole. Of course, it is not the case that the British *only* ruled indirectly.

While in many cases the British swapped from direct rule to indirect rule in its territories because the former was either too costly (Ali et al., 2018, p. 1052) or

engendered too much resentment from their subjects (Collste, 2015, p. 45), there was a great deal of variation both across and even *within* colonies. It would be more correct to say that the British largely employed a mixed rule approach (Mamdani, 2012, pp. 44-5; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020, p. 61). This is true in each of the case studies selected, where colonial administrators would often rule directly in the “core” of the colony, while delegating to local elites in the “peripheries”. This variation can be explained by the fact that the British employed whichever method was cheapest (Levine, 2013, p. 98). Even in cases of indirect rule it is not entirely true that, as Collste argues, ‘domestic affairs were left to traditional authorities’ (2015, p. 71); ultimately, the British retained final say on almost all matters. A third and final challenge is that, even if those guiding colonial policy *did* believe in improving the lives of those the UK governed, time and time again this belief was ignored in favour of ensuring first control, and then that exploitation could be carried out effectively. As such, even the policies that stemmed from such beliefs were often poorly implemented. This final challenge will be considered throughout this chapter.

The British Empire, then, might best be described as an endeavour which purported to be motivated by liberal ideals – and may have been in the eyes of some of its administrators a legitimately paternal adventure – though was fundamentally violent in its enforcement of such ideals. In enforcing these “goods”, colonial administrators also denied the wills and agency of local populations. In the context of this thesis, recognising this contradiction and the denial of agency is essential, since a framework such as the R-r2p must be sensitive to these historical modes of domination in order to avoid non-repetition and thereby be genuinely reparative. While future action under the R-r2p must genuinely have the interests of those to whom it is making reparation at its heart, the professed paternalism of the British

Empire was largely used as a self-justification for colonialism and the economic exploitation at the heart of it (Jackson, 2013, p. 55). It is this aspect of British colonialism to which we now turn.

2.2. Underdevelopment, Economic Deprivation, and Horizontal Inequality

A common claim made of the British Empire is that it was fundamentally, first and foremost, an economic adventure (Ferguson, 2003, xxv) which exploited the territories it colonised for its own gain (Elkins, 2022, p. 367; Osadolor, 2002, p. 32). Whether this was truly the core rationale for colonialism is debatable, but it is undeniable that there have been massive economic consequences of colonial policy. Most of the richest states in the world are former colonial powers, while many of the poorest are former colonies (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2017, p. 81; McCarthy, 2009, p. 4). Despite some claims that the economic gap between the UK and its former colonies only widened *after* independence (Ferguson, 2003, p. 368), such arguments fail to account for the reasons this occurred. Although the economies of some former colonies may have been nominally “developed” in pure GDP terms, this view fails to account for what *types* of “development” were offered and *how* this was provided. By prioritising the metropole’s gain, the UK contributed to uneven development outcomes through a combination of underdevelopment (Elkins, 2022, p. 367; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020, p. 68) and misdevelopment (Collste, 2015, p. 49). Such patterns of development have entrenched a lasting economic insecurity and precarity, which in turn has reduced resilience to mass atrocities (Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1084). While not all the economic problems facing former colonies

today can be laid at the feet of the British (nor should it), it is hard to argue with the 'path dependent outcome' of colonialism (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2017, p. 81).

"Development", as Perkins et al note, lacks a definition with consensus (2013, p. 23). The fact that some colonies were wealthier *during* the colonial era, as Ferguson argues, might be understood as successful development if we hold GDP and a booming trade economy as vital to our definition.⁸ But such a view fails to ask questions about *who* is really benefitting from this wealth. For the most part, barring those elites at the top of the colonial hierarchy, the UK's subject populations did not reap the advantages of this kind of "development". Rather, the opposite is the case: in prioritising industries which served only the metropole, such as monocropping (the development of a single cash crop only), indigenous populations were often coerced into precarious positions with severe economic consequences (Rodney, 2018, p. 90). Should harvests fail, or the value of a particular product fall, such populations had nothing to fall back on. In this sense, we might instead understand British policy as *misdevelopment*, at best misguided and at worst malicious. In either case, the British administrators denied the agency of local populations in shaping their own economic futures.

While acknowledging the definitional blurriness of "development", Perkins et al argue that 'increases in the material well-being of individuals as well as improvements in basic health and education' are common elements (2013, p. 23). This thesis is sympathetic to a "heterodox" approach which 'foregrounds wellbeing and social good rather than growth' (Russel et al., 2022, p. 1080). As Sen argues, for

⁸ Though even this might also be challenged since many colonies became, comparatively, much *poorer* through colonialism. Prior to colonisation, for instance, India's share of the world economy (in GDP terms) was approximately 23%, but had been transformed into 'a global poster child of poverty and famine' by independence (Tharoor, 2016, p. 216).

example, development should be seen as ‘a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy’, and this cannot be achieved solely through growth (2001, p. 3). Similarly, Nussbaum argues in favour of development that focuses on improving ‘human capabilities’ in a way that fosters personal liberty and dignity (2000, p. 5). Normatively, then, the goal of any process of “development” should not only be to abstractly increase GDP, but also to benefit populations. It is to this type of development which this chapter primarily refers. For the most part, however, indigenous populations did not benefit from colonial development.

While those sympathetic to the British Empire note that it built schools and hospitals (Biggar, 2023), Rodney notes that in many of the UK’s African colonies it was not for the colonised that they were built, but for the colonisers (2018, p. 109). It has become almost commonplace for apologists for the Empire to argue that the UK brought railways to its colonies (as noted by, for example: Tharoor, 2017), but the main purpose of this was not to ease the travel of the colonised but instead to ease the travel of goods to coasts for the purpose of export (Rodney, 2018, p. 110). British administrators (as with many other colonial powers) only truly began to consider the good of the populations they dominated in the aftermath of the Second World War (Rodney, 2018, p. 108; Ukelina, 2017, xxii), yet even here development was uneven. Rodney suggests that this type of development which *did* aim to improve the lives of the colonised was predominantly offered only to those in economically advantageous regions (2018, p. 110). This uneven development recurs throughout each of the case studies and has played a vital role in engendering lasting horizontal inequality and tensions.

The colonial administration in Myanmar has been criticised for failing to develop the state’s economy by independence (Booth, 2003, p. 166). Indeed, the

failure to rebuild following the Second World War has been highlighted as a particular oversight (Booth, 2003, p. 166; Prasse-Freeman and Latt, 2018, p. 406). As with many other colonies, the British also developed the state's economy unevenly, ensuring 'that different races remained on largely different roads to political and economic development' (Alam, 2019, p. 5). While it is true that post-independence governments likely could have accomplished more economically than they did (Booth, 2003, p. 166), it is worth once again emphasising the obstacles facing such governments. Indeed, Prasse-Freeman and Latt, for instance, note that the failure of the colonial administration to include many Burmese within the economic architecture inhibited the economic transition at independence, rendering post-colonial problems harder to reckon with (2018, p. 406). While the crisis in Myanmar has been labelled as 'not at this time primarily a conflict over resources, greed or economic issues' (Ware and Laoutides, 2019, p. 76), it remains the case that horizontal inequality and economic deprivation can both incentivise the perpetration of atrocity crimes and reduce the resilience of those who are victim to it. Chowdhury, for instance, has highlighted how economic challenges have encouraged perceptions of the Rohingya as an 'economic threat and burden' (2020, p. 601), while Alam states that colonialism has contributed to the 'socio-economic insecurity encircling the Rohingya' (2019, p. 2). As such, the UK might especially bear a reparative responsibility to protect the Rohingya, or to improve their economic resilience where possible.

As with many other former colonies, the conduct of the British administration in colonial Sudan has been deemed especially extractive and exploitative (Wise, 2020, p. 138), with little attention paid to how best to benefit the populations it ruled over (Ayers, 2010, p. 159). Such a failure was not merely an administrative

oversight, but rather a key component of the UK's divide and rule strategy. For instance, it would be more accurate to say that rather than the whole colony being underdeveloped, *parts* of the colony were developed and others were not (Ayers, 2010, p. 157; Ejami, 2020, p. 974; Johnson, 2016, p. 17; Young, 2018, p. 35), generating lasting horizontal inequality. In particular, scholars have noted that the British helped to construct a stark economic contrast between the core of the state and its peripheries (Wise, 2020, p. 138; Young, 2018, p. 35). Indeed, this difference was most pronounced between the north and south of the colony (Ayers, 2019, p. 159; Lesch, 1998, p. 32; Pinaud, 2021, p. 20; Sharkey, 2003, p. 9). Such a contrast served to engender tensions between the more developed north and the peripheries of the state post-independence.

It is also true that there was not entirely *even* development in the north either, with non-Muslim areas such as the Nuba Mountains especially suffering (Johnson, 2016, p. 17; Lesch, 1998, p. 32). Likewise, some parts of the south such as those areas home to pastoral groups hardly benefited from development (Johnson, 2016, p. 17). While interfering in Sudan's economic affairs alone demands rectification, the UK consequently bears a particular responsibility for doing so in a way which gave rise to tensions between various groups. This model of uneven development has a direct relation to the current perpetration of atrocity crimes, given the fact that competition over resources and pastoral land have been directly linked to conflict in both Sudan and South Sudan (GCR2P, 2026c; GCR2P, 2026d). As such, the UK bears a reparative responsibility to, for example, offer economic aid to groups and individuals which might otherwise enlist with militia groups.

Like colonial Sudan, economic gain has been cited as the primary rationale driving administration of Nigeria (Adeyeri and Adejuwon, 2012, p. 9; Falola and

Heaton, 2008, p. 116; Princewill, Lucas and Daniel, 2020, p. 61). Indeed, Falola and Heaton cite economics as the 'ostensible reason for amalgamating the Nigerian protectorates' (2008, p. 116), that is, combining the once separately ruled northern and southern protectorates into a single administrative unit. Even by this point, the two protectorates 'were already on very different paths' (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 116), pointing to the artificiality of the new state. This economic rationale did not concern the best interests of the populations living in the newly amalgamated territory; rather, the colonial administration was overwhelmingly exploitative (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 10; Yusuf, 2017, p. 7). In fact, because of the economic cost of development, Falola and Heaton claim that there was an unwillingness to invest in the colony (2008, p. 121). Rather, the British "developed" the Nigerian economy in a way that most benefited themselves. As with many other colonies, the colonial administration in Nigeria has been criticised for monocropping and focusing agriculturally on cash crops (Yusuf, 2017, p. 70). Even when administrators did attempt to "improve" the lives of those in the colonial state through development, it was markedly uneven. This was especially the case when it came to access to education, with populations in the north facing far more barriers than those in the south (MacEachern, 2018, p. 8), leading the latter to develop contempt for 'ethnic groups in the north for their relative lack of Western education' (Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, p. 5).

In fact, the main consequence of colonial economic policy might be how it has generated tensions between groups and incentivised conflict over scarce resources (Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, p. 7; Falola, 2009, p. 177). This is particularly pertinent in rural areas where resources are scarcer, which is unsurprising given that, at independence, 'urban and rural areas were developing along very different

paths' (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 156). In this regard, the economic consequences of British colonialism can be seen as having direct relevance to the ongoing crisis in Nigeria. The GCR2P, for instance, highlight that mass atrocities are occurring because of violence 'over scarce resources', particularly in farming regions (GCR2P, 2026b). Likewise, Ofongo has noted that economic deprivation has created incentives for insurgency (2016, p. 157). Finally, mass atrocities may occur since the military and security services lack the capacity to deal with multiple crises at once (GCR2P, 2026b). In this light, the British can be said to bear a reparative responsibility to diminish the economic incentives of joining militia groups such as Boko Haram, as well as to increase the capacity of the Nigerian security forces to prevent and reckon with atrocity crimes.

In inhibiting economic security in its former colonies, the UK has weakened state capacity to deal with atrocity crimes. This is particularly pronounced in Nigeria, where weakened military capacity has led to difficulties in reckoning with militia groups and Boko Haram. Likewise, economic insecurity has directly driven some men to join such groups. Resource scarcity and uneven development has also generated tensions between groups and serves as a key driver of conflict in both Sudan and South Sudan. While, as stated above, neither horizontal inequality nor weak state capacity are necessarily key drivers of conflict and mass atrocity crimes in Myanmar – especially given that atrocities are largely carried out *by* the state – it might be argued that the economic consequences of colonialism have inhibited the resilience of groups subjected to atrocity crimes. It must also be emphasised that, even had the UK more effectively developed healthy economies in its colonies and empowered them after independence, this would not rid the state of its reparative obligations; such development would still likely have been largely coercive, with

reparative responsibilities thus stemming once again from the deliberate denial of agency. However, having dismissed the notion that “successful development” would not have generated reparative responsibilities, one might assign responsibilities on the basis of what happened rather than the counterfactual. In this regard, the UK might have a responsibility to attempt in some way to rectify the deprivation facing populations in its former colonies, to increase the resilience of groups targeted by atrocity crimes, and to increase state capacity to prevent such crimes where possible. In doing this, the UK must also work to challenge two other key legacies of British colonialism exacerbated by its economic policies: heightened ethnic fragmentation and intercommunal conflict.

2.3. Ethnic Tensions and Intercommunal Violence

Mass atrocity crimes are largely identity-based and often take place between ethnic groups. It is worrying, then, that the most pernicious legacies of British colonialism are the ethnic divides and intercommunal hatred fostered by colonial policy. Such a legacy should have been anticipated, though colonial officials often prioritised their own gain over the wishes of the local populations. For instance, one of the most enduring features of British colonialism is the creation of artificial borders (Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2014, p. 326; Crowcroft, 2017, p. 249; Young, 1994, p. 234), despite the fact that many of the states within these new borders had never been ruled jointly previously. Indeed, for many colonies, the decision to maintain these artificial borders was only reached on the eve of independence when the UK was ‘persuaded of the higher viability of larger sovereign units’ (Young, 1994, p. 240). In other words, the last-minute paternalism of the UK has had lasting

consequences for many former colonies (Alesina, Easterly, and Matuszeski, 2011, p. 247).

Though ethnicity was not a significant source of conflict in many pre-colonial states (Bakwesegha, 2004, p. 56; Levine, 2013, p. 151; Nnoli, 1998, p. 11), artificial borders alone are not necessarily a cause of ethnic conflict. Indeed, ethnic groups which fall within these 'imagined communities' (Young, 1994, p. 234) often had at least some interaction prior to colonisation. Rodney even goes as far as arguing that, for the most part, 'the large states in nineteenth-century Africa were multiethnic, and their expansion was continually making anything like "tribal" loyalty a thing of the past' (2018, p. 119). Perhaps, had the UK truly engaged with nation-building, the artificiality of the borders would have faded with time; however, the conduct of the colonial officials in fact served to entrench said divisions through the implementation of divide and rule tactics.

As stated above, the British Empire is perceived to be typified by indirect rule but in fact often adopted a mixed approach both across and within colonies (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020, p. 61). This form of administration served to heighten division, in that it allowed special privileges for some ethnic groups while engendering resentment among those directly ruled. Furthermore, a mixed approach ensured that the populations in the territory would often not have had a shared experience of colonial rule by independence. This was central to the divide and rule approach: by preventing shared grievances and privileging some groups over others, the British inhibited a unified front against its rule. As such, ethnic groups might be thrown into conflict depending on the extent to which they were favoured by the ruling colonial class. It is unsurprising, then, that heightened ethnic consciousness and tensions between groups have been identified as major features of British

colonialism (Ali et al., 2018, p. 1053; Bakwesegha, 2004, p. 56; Boyce, 1999, p. 202; Collste, 2015, p. 22; Lange and Dawson, 2009, p. 785; Levine, 2013, p. 151; Mamdani, 2018, xiii; Ng, 2022, p. 193; Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012, p. 211; Nnoli, 1998, pp. 18-9).

In pursuit of this goal the British would not only entrench existing identities, but also create new ones where none existed previously (Ali et al., 2018, p. 1053; Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2014, p. 320; Levine, 2013, p. 151; Macqueen, 2007, p. 79; Mamdani, 2009, p. 146). One way that the British would entrench existing identities would be by fuelling conflict through the explicit politicisation of ethnicity and race (Mamdani, 2012, p. 3; Mamdani, 2018, xiii), linking these characteristics to access to basic resources such as land (Ali et al., 2018, pp. 1048-9; Jackson, 2013, p. 36; Mamdani, 2012, p. 73). As such, it became harder for local populations to shed their assigned ethnic categories, artificial or not. Having established the willingness of British colonial administrators to instil lasting ethnic divisions generally, it is worth now turning to each of the case studies to observe in more depth the legacy of artificial borders and divide and rule tactics; first, in Myanmar.

As with many other colonies, ethnic identities were not a major source of conflict in Myanmar prior to the colonial period in part because such identities were understood differently, as less oppositional and static (Alam, 2019, p. 6; Ferguson, 2015, p. 6; South, 2009, p. 4); indeed, as Cho puts it, 'colonisation marked a profound shift in social organisation' (2018, p. 43). Colonisation, however, served to bring about civil conflict, in part through the creation of artificial borders (Alam, 2019, p. 5; Chowdhury, 2020, p. 591; Ng, 2022, p. 199). This is particularly pronounced in Rakhine State (historically, Arakan), which had been part of Burma for only 40 years prior to British colonisation, and yet remained *part of* Burma at the time of

independence in 1948. This seemingly artificial inclusion of Rakhine State has been directly linked to the current ongoing crisis in the state (Hein, 2018, p. 365; Ibrahim, 2016, p. 18; Shahabuddin, 2019, p. 336; p. 356).

It is not merely these artificial borders alone that generated identity-based conflict, however. According to Chowdhury, relations between Muslims and Buddhists in the region were largely peaceful prior to colonisation (2020, p. 591). Rather, it is *how* British colonial officials failed to reckon with the artificiality, instead ensuring its survival, that matters. One means through which the British did this was the 1823 census, which served to entrench a rigid understanding of ethnic groups as native to certain territories (Ferguson, 2015, pp. 5-6). In her work on the census, Kolås argues that while some dispute the power of these censuses in truly *creating* new categories on the ground, it was certainly used as a tool by the state to categorise people into identity-based groups which in turn reified ethnic identities (2025, p. 423). This census has continued to shape contemporary challenges around ethnicity in Myanmar today (Ferguson, 2015, p. 4), especially in debates on the citizenship of the Rohingya (Kolås, 2025, p. 423). Modern censuses have, in fact, replicated earlier ethnic categorisations all while receiving support from Western donors (Kolås, 2025, p. 424) such as the UK (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014, p. 27). The 2014 census, for instance, mirrored the colonial censuses (Kolås, 2025, p. 426) by not even *counting* the Rohingya (Mulaj, 2025, p. 952).

Within these arbitrary internal borders there were also vastly different modes of rule (Alam, 2019, pp. 5-6; Ibrahim, 2016, p. 26; James, 2006, p. 95; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 237; Ng, 2022, pp. 189-90; Steinberg, 2010, p. 28), with the main split being between the directly ruled core and the indirectly ruled peripheries. At the core were the majority Bamar ethnic group who often resented the British, while the

peripheries were dominated by smaller ethnic groups like the Karen or the Rohingya, who were regarded as being more loyal to the colonial administration. This form of mixed rule was central to inhibiting unified opposition to the colonial administration. In partitioning the state between the core and the periphery, between the dominant Buddhist Bamar and other non-Buddhist ethnic groups, the colonial administration entrenched religious and ethnic identities and deepened divisions (Alam, 2019, p. 5; Bakali, 2021, p. 58; Cho, 2018, p. 43; Ferguson, 2015, pp. 5-6; Hein, 2018, p. 367; Lee, 2021, p. 75; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 236; Mukherjee, 2019b, pp. 26-7; Myint-U, 2004, p. 10; Ng, 2022, p. 199; Ware and Laoutides, 2019, p. 70). This was achieved by favouring ethnic groups like the Karen and the Rohingya over the dominant Bamar majority (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 7; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 236; Mukherjee, 2019b, pp. 26-7), not only in terms of *how* they were ruled (Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 237), but also in the opportunities available to them (Bakali, 2021, p. 58; Lee, 2021, p. 44; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 238; Ng, 2022, p. 189). Ethnicity was consequently explicitly politicised in Myanmar, with constituencies even set up on this basis (South, 2009, p. 20; Taylor, 2007, p. 81).

These ethnic tensions came to a head during the Second World War (Adams, 2019, pp. 437-8; Alam, 2019, p. 5; Bakali, 2021, p. 58; Chowdhury, 2020, p. 598; Ibrahim, 2016, p. 7; Lee, 2012, p. 52; Steinberg, 2010, p. 36; Zahed, 2021, p. 442), with some ethnic minority groups such as the Rohingya and the Karen choosing to side with the British as guerilla fighters rather than with the Japanese, as the Bamar did. The war was particularly consequential in Rakhine State, partitioning a previously mixed community into two distinctive Muslim and Buddhist sections (Chowdhury, 2020, p. 598; Ibrahim, 2016, p. 7; Lee, 2012, p. 52). Such ethnic divisions could perhaps have been reconciled, however, had the British not fomented

mutual distrust with promises of separate independence to both the Karen (Mukherjee, 2019b, p. 37; South, 2009, p. 22) and the Rohingya (Alam, 2019, p. 12; Ibrahim, 2016, p. 7; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 246; Zahed, 2021, p. 442) and then subsequently reneged following the end of the war. In doing so, the British increased the likelihood that ethnic minority groups would always be suspected of separatism – a suspicion that was heightened by Rohingya demands to be included into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) if true independence would not be granted (Bakali, 2021, p. 58; Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 246).

Given that British colonialism facilitated a division between the Burmese core and the border regions and generated resentment between ethnic groups in these two domains by favouring the latter over the former (for the most part) and applying different systems of rule, it is unsurprising that the new government faced secessionist movements at independence in 1948 (Booth, 2003, p. 142). Myanmar today continues to face these problems. These are particularly pronounced within the Rohingya and Karen ethnic groups, which differ from the dominant Bamar not only in terms of “ethnicity” but also religion (the Rohingya are Muslim, and the Karen have no unifying religion). Conflict between these minority ethnic groups and the Bamar has been rife since independence, providing ample opportunity for the perpetration of atrocity crimes. Today, its ‘citizenship regime is arguably one of the most racialized in the world’ (Rhoads, 2023, p. 51), with Cheesman arguing that the contemporary politics of the state are rooted in an understanding of national races with its foundations in the colonial era (2017, pp. 461-4). Though post-independence leaders of course bear the brunt of the responsibility for failing to reckon with ethnic divides and for failing to amend the citizenship system in line with reality, it remains the case that the British colonial administration is culpable in facilitating civil strife

and inhibiting the growth of a truly inclusive national character. This stained record holds true also for the case of colonial Sudan.

Unlike Myanmar, it would be unfair to say that racial and ethnic identities were not a major source of conflict in pre-colonial Sudan: racial tensions between Muslim Arab groups and African groups date back centuries, primarily because the former enslaved the latter (Idris, 2005, p. 4). Although it would be unwise to broadly paint this partition as a pure north-south divide, it does seem that British colonial administrators largely understood their rule of Sudan in this sense, with many scholars drawing attention to the way in which the north of the country was artificially divided from the south during the colonial period (Idris, 2005, p. 23; Johnson, 2016, p. 11; Jok, 2007, p. 79; Mamdani, 2009, p. 175; Theron, 2022, p. 4; Zambakari, 2013, p. 9). Not only was the south of the colony only fully colonised thirty years after the establishment of the condominium (Lesch, 1998, p. 31; Young, 2018, p. 32), but it was also kept largely separate from the north administratively (Idris, 2005, p. 39; Johnson, 2016, p. 11; Theron, 2022, p. 25; Young, 2018, p. 35). This is epitomised, as in Myanmar and many other British colonies, by a distinction between the directly ruled core and indirectly ruled peripheries:

The British practice of colonial administration, called “Indirect Rule” in other countries, was referred to as “Devolution” or “Native Administration” in Sudan, and further distinguished the south from the north. The government barely intervened in the south, [and] administered through a system of government chiefs.

(Pinaud, 2021, p. 19)

This inconsistent and preferential treatment entrenched racial and ethnic identities and deepened tensions in Sudan (Ayers, 2010, p. 153; Lesch, 1998, p. 7; Mamdani, 2009, pp. 145-6; Pinaud, 2021, p. 21; Wise, 2020, p. 138; p. 146; Zambakari, 2013, p. 12). Such entrenchment has been highlighted as a consequence of the British policy of indirect rule, since it encouraged fragmentation and loyalty to local authorities over state ones (Idris, 2005, p. 40; Idris, 2019, p. 596). This was of course most pronounced *between* the north and the south (Johnson, 2016, p. 25; Theron, 2022, p. 39), given the differences in administration between the two regions, though it is also present *within* the north and the south (Lesch, 1998, p. 18; Pinaud, 2021, p. 21). Indeed, Pinaud claims that prior to the colonial period there were 'no clear ethnic boundaries in the south, to the surprise of the British officers who came in 1898' (2021, p. 20). Colonial rule in the south largely operated through local chiefs rather than a central government (Pinaud, 2021, p. 19), and thus it is perhaps unsurprising that 'fragmentation in the south is greater than in the north' (Lesch, 1998, p. 18). The north itself may be less fragmented, but British colonial policy did serve to further entrench the pre-existing divide between Arab and African groups.

Despite its supposedly liberal ideals (Biggar, 2023), the British Empire in many ways failed to create more egalitarian societies in the territories they colonised, and Sudan is no exception. Although the British might have empowered certain groups in the south and other peripheral regions of the colony, this ultimately served to reinforce the privilege of pre-existing elite groups in such areas (Ayers, 2010, p. 157). These elites and the groups they came from were also poorly represented *nationally*. For instance, when selecting students to attend the foremost educational institution in Sudan, Gordon College, the British would often choose middle-class

Muslim Arabs (Sharkey, 2003, p. 8). As such, these groups would have the readiest access to positions of power not only in the colonial architecture, but also in the post-colonial state itself after independence. Likewise, those trained to become officers in the colonial army were almost exclusively those from the core (Berridge, 2023, p. 539). Across the board the colonial administrators favoured 'selected groups of Arab-Muslims from central Sudan while excluding populations of the periphery' (Ylönen, 2009, p. 47). Of course, not all Arab groups were equally favoured: the British would support most those deemed 'good-native groups', that is, those friendly to the colonial administration (Ejami, 2020, p. 974).

The groups which were perhaps most neglected, or even persecuted, by the British were those which were nomadic (Mamdani, 2009, p. 167; Pinaud, 2021, p. 23). In the view of the British administration, such groups operated beyond the confines of the system, since for the most part each ethnic group was assigned a (often artificial) tribal homeland, or a *dar*. These homelands transformed 'tribe from a benign administrative identity into a basis for discriminating against one group of colonised in favour of another' (Mamdani, 2009, p. 152). Tribal identities were further entrenched through this system since it explicitly tied identity to territory (Justin and De Vries, 2019, p. 33; Theron, 2022, p. 39), and made it so access to basic resources and positions in the local administration was limited to only those 'said to be native' to the region (Mamdani, 2009, p. 151). While such a system is arguably wrong in its own right, since it encourages regional chauvinism, its implementation also generated further consequences. For instance, rather than merely creating these *dars* where they found local populations, Justin and De Vries note that these were often the artificial product of forced displacement (2019, p. 34). Despite the intentions of the British, many of these relocated communities instead 'continue to

claim ownership of the land they were relocated from' (Justin and De Vries, 2019, p. 35). Nomadic and pastoral tribes were often not even assigned a tribal homeland (Mamdani, 2009, p. 167), a process which Zambakari calls 'cultural genocide' (2013, p. 23). If such groups lack access to representation and basic resources, one might expect them to be driven to conflict (Kulang and Ogbonna, 2021, p. 10).

By institutionalising this administrative change, the British colonial officials not only entrenched ethnic identity and divides, but also politicised them (Idris, 2005, p. 20; Theron, 2022, p. 86). Again, while political divisions did exist within the largely Arab north and African south, it was most pronounced in terms of a political divide between these two regions. Indeed, the UK even considered granting the north of the colony separate independence and incorporating the south into its East Africa colonies (Johnson, 2016, p. 25; Mamdani, 2009, p. 175; Theron, 2022, p. 25). Such an outcome was supposedly never seriously considered (Johnson, 2016, p. 25; Lesch, 1998, pp. 33-4), though, and the British ultimately failed to consider the wishes of southerners in granting independence to the colony. Indeed, early advisory councils created to begin the process to independence lacked any representatives from the south (Lesch, 1998, p. 34).

Likewise, Lesch notes that control of the civil service across the territory was essentially transferred outright to northerners:

the program to Sudanize the civil service, announced at the end of 1954, appointed only six southerners to 800 senior administrative posts. No southerners became governors, deputy governors, or district commissioners; northern officials ruled the south

(1998, p. 35)

As such, populations in the south were voiceless in terms of how independence would be granted and looked to have no control over their own future post-independence. In this light, it is unsurprising that Sudanese governments have faced separatist rebellions since 1955 (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006, p. 13). It would be unfair to assign full responsibility for Sudan and South Sudan's politicised ethnicities and tensions to the UK, as some of the precedents for these predate colonial rule (Johnson, 2016, p. 7). However, the UK does at least bear some share of the responsibility for the fragmentation of the south and the minoritisation of peripheral regions in the north. In some senses, then, it is the artificial borders imposed by the UK that generate the most responsibilities – as is the case with Nigeria.

Prior to colonisation, there was no such state as “Nigeria”. This is not to say, however, that there was no interaction between the various peoples that comprised colonial Nigeria. Momoh, for instance, notes that these peoples interacted in various ways (2002, p. 18), while Ugwueze suggests that such groups both ‘fought many international wars and cooperated (where necessary) with one another just like other empires and hamlets in world history’ (2020, p. 12). While it is possible that some of these wars could have engendered long-standing tensions that lasted even through the colonial period and were reproduced in post-independence politics, it is unclear to what extent these conflicts were ethnicity-based. What is apparent, however, is that many of these formerly self-governing groups (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 6; Lenshie, 2014, p. 198) were brought forcefully together into a new form of existence. Indeed, as several authors have made clear, Nigeria is itself a colonial creation (Odeh, 2007, p. 74; Ugwueze, 2020, p. 12). Not only were the northern and southern protectorates “amalgamated” into a single artificial state (Yusuf, 2017, p. 4), but even the protectorates themselves were artificial (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 6).

This amalgamation has been cited by many historians and critics as a source of challenges, both during the colonial era and in contemporary Nigeria (Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001, p. 2; Maiangwa et al., 2018, p. 4; Princewill et al., 2020, p. 61; Varin and Onuoha, 2020, p. 225). Maiangwa et al. highlight ‘militancy agitations, political corruption, and ethnoreligious crises’ in particular as a consequence of amalgamation (2018, p. 4). The artificiality of the Nigerian state post-amalgamation is highlighted by the fact that the two former protectorates were still largely administered in different ways (Osadolor, 2002, p. 33). The regions shared some commonalities though; for instance, both were indirectly ruled. However, even the *form* of indirect rule practiced was different, with rule in the north assuming a more autocratic character than that in the south (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 116). In terms of rule, education, social services, law, and many other areas, the north and the south enjoyed different experiences under colonial rule (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 116; Lenshie, 2014, p. 164; Osadolor, 2002, p. 33). Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars claim the British never actually intended Nigeria to function as a unified state (Maiangwa et al., 2018, p. 3).

Nigeria is the crucible in which the practice of British indirect rule was perfected, under the guidance of Frederick Lugard. Indirect rule was not practiced for the benefit of the populations, however, but to prevent political unity and thus anti-colonial sedition (Boyce, 1999, p. 199; Lenshie, 2014, p. 163). Indeed, along with Uganda, indirect rule in Nigeria has been labelled as at the ‘extreme’ end of the spectrum (Lange, 2004, p. 908). This indirect rule empowered local chiefs by creating new positions for them within the imperial hierarchy (Rodney, 2018, p. 118), often resulting in competitions over ‘fresh opportunities offered by British rule’ (Falola, 2009, p. 177) which in turn inhibited any sense of shared national identity

(Boyce, 1999, pp. 199-200; Osadolor, 2002, p. 31). As such, indirect rule served to entrench ethnic identities and further divide and separate local identities (Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001, p. 2; Heerten and Moses, 2014, p. 172; Ugwueze, 2020, p. 22). Identities were increasingly isolated (Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001, p. 2), and in some cases groups 'exhibited strong tendencies towards exclusion, competition and authoritarianism' (Mustapha, 1998, p. 40). Such exclusionary sentiments were often exacerbated further by the preferential treatment colonial officials gave to certain groups (Rodney, 2018, p. 119). For instance, British policy favoured Fulani tribes (Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001, p. 2; Sen, 2002, p. 128), and Osadolor suggests the British were more lenient to the north than the south of the colony (2002, p. 35). Further to this, Mustapha attributes contemporary anti-Christian, anti-Igbo, and anti-south sentiments in the north of Nigeria to the colonial policy of indirect rule (1998, p. 40).

By the 1940s, these entrenched ethnic identities were beginning to become explicitly politicised (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 150). Rather than serving as a constructive means through which to craft a national purpose and mitigate divides, the advent of democracy instead simply transformed cultural groups into formal political parties which in turn sought hegemony in the regions they lived (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 153). Smaller ethnic groups were thus steamrolled in favour of larger ones, with the colony (and subsequent state at independence) largely solidifying into three different regions: 'Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbos in the east' (Heerten and Moses, 2014, p. 172). Belonging to one of these three ethnic identities became one of the principal means of 'accessing political and economic powers', and exacerbated the exclusionary nature of politics (Ugwueze, 2020, p. 22). The constant regional power struggles that such exclusionary politics

have precipitated have been linked to the insurgencies Nigeria faces today, in particular the rise of Boko Haram (Ofongo, 2016, p. 154). Likewise, it is not surprising given this history that election periods are often febrile in Nigeria, and that many mass atrocities have been perpetrated in the name of both religion and ethnicity.

Across each of the three case studies, as well as the Empire more generally, the construction of artificial borders, tenuous yet rigid ethnic groupings, and politicisation of such identity markers have had drastic consequences for the peoples residing in former British colonies. Centrally, such colonial policies have often engendered heightened ethnic tensions and therefore created conditions permissive to the perpetration of mass atrocity crimes. In this regard, the UK may have a reparative obligation to help build the resilience of groups likely to fall victim to such crimes, or to assist in the building of more inclusive societies where possible – though, it would be fair to suspect the intentions of the UK should it try to do this. A path forward for this will be explored in more detail in the following chapters. Post-colonial governments often attempted to deal with ethnic divisions and its resultant civil conflict via many of the same methods the colonial administrations did: authoritarian violence.

2.4. Susceptibility to Authoritarianism and Weak Institutions

As a result of the various economic consequences of British colonial policy, as well as the challenges posed by artificial borders, civil strife, and separatist movements, many former British colonies have weak and fragile state institutions. It is perhaps surprising, then, that there are those who laud the supposed peaceful

transition to democracy at independence. Indeed, Ferguson hails the democratic inheritance of former British colonies as an achievement, claiming that ‘just under half (twenty-six) were still democracies in 1993’ (2003, p. 371). This does not seem a convincing argument. Instead, it would be a better question to ask to what extent these 26 states were truly “democratic”, and why the other twenty-seven were no longer democracies. Some of the largest British colonies, including each of the case studies, were authoritarian soon after independence; Myanmar and Sudan remain so today. Likewise, though Bernhard et al. find evidence to suggest that time under British rule did encourage ‘democratic survival’, they also emphasise that this “positive” legacy should not be overstated (2004, p. 245). It would in fact be more accurate to argue that ‘despite facilitating short-term democratic gains relative to other European empires, in general British rule failed to engender conditions for consolidating democracy’ (Lee and Paine, 2019, p. 501). In fact, though Ferguson cites the supposed democratic inheritance as a result of *indirect rule* (2003, p. 371), others have instead asserted that it is this very feature which inhibited the survival of democratic institutions (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2017, p. 161; Lange, 2004, p. 906). These institutional weaknesses have had significant ramifications for mass atrocity risk today.

The process of indirect rule, and thus the strategy of divide and rule, ‘weakened the central state’ (Ali et al., 2018, p. 1049), and in many regards encouraged the use of authoritarian methods. Though democracy may have been haphazardly installed immediately preceding independence, the architecture was largely makeshift and there was in many cases only a minority of the population to help run it. Often, those who took control of the institutional architecture post-independence were ‘corrupt elites [...] men that the British had groomed as their

successors' (Jackson, 2013, pp. 112-3). Njoh and Akiwumi note that in most African colonies, though especially Cameroon and Sierra Leone (both states which have experienced mass atrocity crimes also), the post-independence leaders 'inherited the politico-administrative models of their respective erstwhile colonial master nations' (2012, p. 210). The same is true, however, of British colonies beyond Africa. Though this may have involved the democratic architecture outlined above, it also meant that said leaders inherited the same authoritarian tools of power that colonial administrators had used to combat anti-colonial sentiment and separatism. Again, this is particularly pronounced in Africa, where Gegout argues that authoritarianism is a structural legacy of colonialism (2018, p. 87). It is unfair to blame the UK alone for the descent of many former colonies into authoritarian modes of rule. However, it is at least fair to say that, given the dire economic challenges post-independence leaders faced, alongside weak democratic architecture, separatist movements, and conflict between different groups, many leaders would have been willing to exploit the authoritarian modes of rule inherited from the colonial administration to secure the state.

Myanmar presents a prime example of a state where such tools were used to quell separatist movements. Initially, independence proceeded with a transition to democracy (though Aung San, the leader of the winning party at the time of the election, was assassinated). Military rule began in part just a decade later in 1958, however, before General Ne Win fully seized power in 1962, establishing an authoritarian state. This seems to support Lee and Paine's claim that any democratic benefits from British rule were short-lived (2019, p. 501). It is worth exploring why this was the case, and in what ways (if at all) the administration of British colonial officials played a role. Perhaps the failure of democratic rule in Myanmar can be

explained in part by the way in which the British implemented it. For instance, colonial administrators first 'decapitated the existing social order in Myanmar' (Taylor, 2007, p. 74). Though this system was, arguably, in itself authoritarian, the British also erased any other nascent precolonial political institutions, replacing them in turn with new systems alien to the local context (Alam, 2019, p. 17; Myint-U, 2004, pp. 253-4). This, combined with the fact that the new institutions implemented by the British had little time to become functional before independence (Myint-U, 2004, pp. 253-4), meant that the leaders of post-colonial Burma were left with the task of running a state through the fragile apparatus bequeathed by their former rulers (Alam, 2019, pp. 4-5).

Rather than a decentralised and inclusive system of government, British colonial policy seemed to incentivise greater centralised control of regional areas (Steinberg, 2010, pp. 30-1), and in many ways may have been perceived as necessary given the existence of separatist movements. Indeed, Lee notes that 'to rule a disparate and divided nation, the military government weaponized history, ethnicity and religion as tools of control' (2021, p. 3). In doing so, the military governments of Myanmar (though Aung San Suu Kyi's government also used these tools to some extent) have exploited not only the colonial playbook, but even some of the same laws (Steinberg, 2010, p. 39). As mentioned above, they have also further exploited the citizenship regime implemented by the British (Alam, 2019, p. 7). In this sense, the UK bears at least some responsibility for the continued use of authoritarian tools and thus bears some responsibility to protect groups when such tools are used to perpetrate mass atrocity crimes against them.

Like Myanmar, Sudan was left with a weak institutional legacy at independence (Massoud, 2013, p. 44). Centrally, political development largely

focused on the northern core of the country (Theron, 2022, p. 26). Indeed, several scholars have noted that there was no real push to implement effective political governance in the south of the country (Arnold and LeRiche, 2012, p. 9; Theron, 2022, p. 26). Because of the different systems of rule and entrenched ethnic and racial divides, the British inhibited the development of a shared nationalism and sense of trust (Massoud, 2013, p. 71; Ylönen, 2009, p. 47), resulting in the creation of a state that 'lacked wide consent and therefore faced many problems' (Sharkey, 2003, p. 140). As stated above, the British colonial administration failed to fairly include representatives from the south in the transition to independence, so that ultimately the colonial architecture remained, albeit now administered almost exclusively by northern Sudanese rather than the British (de Waal, 2025, p. 6; Pinaud, 2021, p. 24). Rather than cede their position and foster an inclusive nationalism where the British failed, this group instead further entrenched divisions in the newly independent state (Ylönen, 2009, p. 48).

In part because of the dominance of those from the north, Sudanese leaders have faced separatist movements since 1955 (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006, p. 13). In order to counter these movements, however, such leaders have often employed the same authoritarian modes of rule exploited under colonialism (Johnson, 2016, p. 30; Massoud, 2013, p. 35; Pinaud, 2021, p. 34; Zambakari, 2013, p. 23). The democratic inheritance in Sudan was exceptionally weak, lasting only two years before a military coup in 1958. British administrators played a key role in empowering the military in the years preceding independence, while simultaneously transforming it into a fundamentally fragmented institution, resulting in 'violent reactions in marginalized regions' following the coup (Berridge, 2023, p. 535). Neither Sudan nor South Sudan have enjoyed many years free of authoritarian rule since independence. As in the

case of Myanmar, the UK might be said to bear some responsibility for the tendency of post-independence leaders and governments to opt for authoritarian technologies of rule, rather than building inclusive, multilateral, and peaceful nations. This should, of course, not be overstated, but it is fair to say that the UK has a responsibility to aid populations in these states who are threatened by such modes of rule.

Unlike Myanmar, Sudan, and South Sudan, the government of Nigeria is today not authoritarian, though the state has experienced many years of military rule since independence and has only been consistently democratic since 1999. This does not, however, mean that colonialism did not inhibit the growth of strong institutions in Nigeria, nor that the state never employs authoritarian technologies of rule: this is most apparent when it comes to Nigeria's security institutions. As with Myanmar, the British essentially erased traditional political institutions (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 115; Shaka, 2005, p. 301). In the case of Igbo regions, Shaka notes that this involved transforming formerly egalitarian cultures into hierarchical ones (2005, p. 301). Indeed, Ugwueze notes that in doing this the colonial administrators were for the most part 'encouraging the installation of their surrogates as leaders', and thereby 'instilled corruption and poor leadership' (2020, p. 23). In doing so, the British instituted machinery which was inherently distrusted (Falola, 2009, p. 185; Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 156). This was not helped by the British strategy of inhibiting the growth of a unifying national identity (Odeh, 2007, p. 74; Ofongo, 2016, p. 148). These factors, along with the economic barriers outlined above, have inhibited state capacity-building (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou, 2020, p. 65) and contributed to a level of fragility that Nigerian governments faced at independence, and continue to face today (Ofongo, 2016, p. 149).

Although Adeyeri and Adejuwon claim that colonial rule did bequeath a 'functional bureaucracy' (2012, p. 1), and despite the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria's leaders have continued to make use of the same violent and authoritarian tools that the colonial administration did (Falola, 2009, p. 185). Others have gone further, suggesting that British colonialism has engendered a tendency towards violence not only in elites and political leaders (Odeh, 2007, p. 74; Princewill et al., 2020, p. 56), but has also precipitated the rise of insurgent groups. As explored above, the activities of Boko Haram have been identified as a natural response to, and consequence of, British colonial rule (Maiangwa et al., 2018, p. 16). The continued centrality of violence to Nigeria is at its clearest, though, when it comes to the state's military and security apparatus. In an attempt to inhibit a unified military, and thus potentially a powerful vehicle for sedition, the British structured the Nigerian army on the basis of ethnicity, allocating recruits to units in this manner (Falola, 2009, p. 179) and thereby entrenching 'sharp divisions and contradictions along political, class, regional, ethnic, and religious lines' (Adejumobi, 2002, p. 175).

Following independence, these divisions incentivised power struggles within the military and regional competitions more generally (Falola, 2009, p. 179). This legacy of British colonialism has been criticised as having 'laid down the foundations for the deep insecurities that Nigeria faces and its inability to successfully address many of the threats it faces today' (Varin and Onuoha, 2020, p. 226). As with other state institutions, the colonial period inhibited the trust the Nigerian population places in the military and police (Varin and Onuoha, 2020, p. 229). This is unsurprising given that both the military and police were used to consolidate British rule during the colonial period, often through excessively violent means (Yusuf, 2017, p. 6). Furthermore, use of military and police violence to consolidate the state did not end

with independence (Varin and Onuoha, 2020, p. 229). In this light, British colonialism can be seen as having had direct consequences in terms of not only the conduct of the state security apparatus, but also how said apparatus is perceived. Primary responsibility for reforming the security institutions that commit these acts of violence lies, of course, with those who run them; however, the UK still bears some reparative responsibility to offer assistance to Nigeria in doing so given the consequences of its own rule. The UK might also be obligated to help the security forces build their ability to reckon with the perpetrators of atrocity crimes, given the weak state capacity to do so.

2.5. Conclusion

British colonialism, regardless of the positive legacies its proponents argue it offered, has had disastrous consequences for its former colonies. These involve, but are not limited to, underdeveloped, misdeveloped, and unevenly developed economies; artificial borders and, with them, entrenched and politicised ethnic, and internecine identity-based conflict; and weak institutions and a tendency towards violent authoritarian rule. These consequences are undoubtedly linked. For instance, underdevelopment and a lack of resources have fuelled tensions and inhibited state capacity. Artificial borders and ethnic conflict have encouraged leaders to manage the state with whatever apparatus they can, often employing the very same methods of divide and rule left behind by colonial officials. It would be unwise and unfair to lay the blame for present crises entirely at the feet of the UK. Indeed, it might seem intuitive that the UK should be held *less* responsible as more time passes since independence; however, this fails to account for how disadvantage is often

accumulated. Once certain modes of rule are established, it becomes increasingly difficult to reorganise. As such, these legacies do not operate independently, nor are they purely historical. Rather, they function as part of a structurally enduring injustice, one that demands reparation.

As this chapter has demonstrated, these legacies endure not in isolation, but as mutually reinforcing drivers of mass atrocity risk. Economic insecurity has at times led to conflict over resources and has eased the recruitment of vulnerable people by insurgent groups. Relatedly, colonial rule exacerbated the already present tensions between ethnic and religious groups, which in turn lowered barriers to identity-based violence. Authoritarian modes of rule have lowered institutional and normative constraints on mass atrocity violence, and at times even encouraged leaders to inflame conflict in order to secure their own position. Together, these drivers form the structural background conditions that make contemporary mass atrocities in Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, and beyond not only more likely, but also more severe. There is thus a moral imperative to reckon with these legacies of colonial rule, and, in this thesis, especially with the atrocities which they have permitted. While this chapter has indicated some implications for *what* must be done, historical analysis alone does not provide a full rationale for responsibility. This chapter has emphasised that both the legacies of colonial injustice and the denial of agency to indigenous populations demand reparation. However, it is also necessary to demonstrate *why* the contemporary UK population ought to bear some of the resulting responsibility. In order to fully conceptualise the R-r2p, this thesis turns now from the reality of enduring harm towards the question of who bears the duty to repair it.

3. From Harm to Duty: Assigning Special Reparative Responsibilities

That colonial harm endures is not in doubt; the challenge, however, is not simply that it persists, but that it remains largely *unremedied*. There are, centrally, two interrelated obstacles to this. Since the formal colonialism explored in the previous chapter ended (in most cases) over half a century ago, it might be thought of as a primarily “historical injustice” (Thompson, 2002, x) where both the perpetrators and victims (for the most part) cannot be located (Blomfield, 2021, p. 1178; Winter, 2006, p. 356), even if its consequences endure. If the perpetrators are dead, then one might ask who exactly ought to bear the responsibility to make reparation. While acknowledging the continuation of the British state, it is not as if the state is a living being in its own right – it is made up *of people*. Why, then, ought the costs of reparation to fall on actors today? At the same time, the number of surviving victims of British colonial rule represent only a minority of their states, as most of those who reside in former colonial territories were born *after* independence (as with the UK). As such, the demands of reparation are different. What, then, does this reparative responsibility require?

Addressing these two questions is central to the goal of this chapter, which is to develop the normative foundations of the R-r2p. Without a full conceptualisation of why contemporary UK populations continue to bear reparative responsibilities, the enduring consequences of colonial injustice might be understood as a tragedy but not as the responsibility of any actor in particular. In addressing this potential pitfall, this chapter undertakes several conceptual tasks. If contemporary actors inherit responsibility, then the basis on which this ‘structural debt’ (Nuti, 2019, p. 160) is

assigned requires clarification. Likewise, given the obvious temporal constraints described above, how best to make reparation *even in this context* needs querying. Clarification must also be offered to the question of *whom* it is that the UK has obligations towards. If British rule, for instance, has had insidious consequences for those even beyond its former colonies, then there is a question as to whether this also demands rectification. In addressing these questions, this chapter presents a framework of guiding principles that will steer implementation of the R-r2p.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section 3.1 begins first with the moral justification for why the link between colonial injustice and mass atrocities established in the previous chapter generates reparative responsibilities, through a discussion of how “special responsibilities” (Bukovansky et al., 2012, p. 57) are usually assigned. Following this, Section 3.2 establishes how British colonial injustice is not merely historical but enduring, as a “historical-structural injustice” (Nuti, 2019, p. 44), thereby placing reparative responsibilities on contemporary UK actors. Having established a rationale for the allocation of reparative responsibilities to contemporary UK actors, Section 3.3 provides an outline as to the normative function of the R-r2p as reparation, in particular, whether it might provide compensation and satisfaction. Section 3.4 then considers to whom exactly it is that reparative obligations are owed under the R-r2p. Following Achiume’s (2019, p. 1561) logic of separating responsibilities into those which are “bilateral” (to the UK’s former colonies), “multilateral” (to all former colonies), and “universal” (to all states), this section proposes locating reparative duties along a spectrum where the foremost are prioritised. Finally, this chapter provides a justification for the guiding principles of the R-r2p framework but abstains from a discussion of the specific reparative measures under consideration in the second half of the thesis.

There is an important caveat to be offered: this chapter will not address whether the UK is solely or even the “most” responsible for the current mass atrocities occurring in its former colonies. To do this would be unnecessary, since this thesis understands responsibility as non-zero sum; that is, just because one agent bears significant responsibility *does not* subtract from the responsibilities of others. Accordingly, this thesis is not concerned with who ultimately ought to bear responsibilities to protect, but whether the UK has a higher responsibility than that which is generally demanded by the R2P, based on its past crimes. Ultimately, this chapter is not arguing that the R-r2p is the only form of reparation the UK should make for colonial injustice, but rather whether said colonial injustice generates reparative responsibilities *vis-à-vis* mass atrocities.

3.1. Types of “Special Responsibility”

In the face of unresolved crises, scholars have argued that it is necessary to allocate to states “special responsibilities” (Bukovansky et al., 2012, p. 57; Miller, 2007, p. 98). This type of responsibility, simply put, ‘is one that only particular members of a social order or particular parties to a given regime of social cooperation, have’ (Bukovansky et al., 2012, p. 57). Many have pointed in particular to the necessity of allocating these duties in response to mass atrocities, since the R2P is currently failed in part by the fact that every state largely bears the same “burden of responsibility” (Erskine, 2016, p. 168; Glanville, 2021, p. 7; Pattison, 2010, p. 4) once a state is manifestly failing in its duties towards its own people. Indeed, as it currently stands, the R2P has resulted in the ‘buck passing’ that Nili claims results in response to most ‘collective action’ problems (2011, p. 39). When

responsibility is diffused among all states (Bellamy, 2023), no single state seems to have any particular incentive to provide remedial support. While special responsibilities may serve to mitigate this (or at least provide a rationale for states to act in particular instances), there is no clear consensus on how such responsibilities ought to be allocated.

There are several different approaches to assigning special responsibilities. The most useful distinction here is between approaches which are primarily backward-looking, allocating by reference to past harm or other forms of historical connection, and those which are primarily forward-looking, allocating responsibility on the basis of likely capacity or remedial effectiveness. This distinction is not absolute, since some theories are backward-looking in allocation but forward-looking in their remedial purpose. Backward-looking approaches should not be understood as synonymous with direct culpability, but are better understood as justified on the basis of what Miller names 'moral responsibility', 'outcome responsibility', and 'causal responsibility' (2007, pp. 100-2). The first of these responsibilities is borne only when an agent has acted 'deliberately or recklessly', resulting in another actor's disadvantaged condition (Miller, 2007, p. 100). In other words, this type of special responsibility presupposes culpability, rather than mere causal involvement. Outcome responsibility, on the other hand, arises where there is a harmful outcome as a side effect of a 'morally neutral or even justified' action (Miller, 2007, p. 100), whereas causal responsibility concerns harm done to an actor which could not have been foreseen (Miller, 2007, p. 102). Miller also suggests that special responsibilities might be allocated on the basis of whether an agent benefited from the harm despite playing no causal role (2007, p. 102). Each of these forms of responsibility is

primarily backward-looking in its basis of allocation because it focuses on the harm itself, rather than on the agent best placed to remedy it.

Proponents of other models have critiqued backward-looking systems of allocation precisely because they may assign responsibility to agents who are poorly placed to provide effective remedy. In the context of humanitarian intervention and atrocity prevention, for instance, scholars have argued that any state which is perceived to be liable for harm might face resistance from the local populations in need of assistance (Fabre, 2012, pp. 190-1; Pattison, 2010, p. 193) and is therefore less likely to be effective. Accordingly, critics of primarily backward-looking approaches advocate instead for models where the remedial interests of those harmed are prioritised over holding liable agents to account. Bukovansky et al., for instance, suggest that ‘special responsibilities ought to be assigned to those [...] with the relevant capability to make the biggest difference’ (2012, p. 222). Likewise, Pattison (in the context of humanitarian intervention), argues that ‘an intervener’s effectiveness is the primary determinant of its legitimacy’ (2010, p. 36). These models are forward-looking in that their primary goal is providing remedial action; however, this system of allocation might also be challenged on the basis that it motivates assistance only in a more general humanitarian sense. More importantly, by not allocating special responsibilities to those deemed liable on the basis of ineffectiveness, such agents evade making good on their wrongs, meaning that other actors have to pay the debt incurred by the original agent, lest the victim(s) suffer.

Purely backward-looking or forward-looking accounts are each insufficient on their own, and special responsibility under the R-r2p requires instead a “hybrid” system of allocation. Several scholars have advanced hybrid approaches of this sort.

Miller, for instance, proposed a ‘connection theory’ of six criteria (2007, p. 100),⁹ while Glanville offers a sequence of five principles to be used specifically for allocating duties under the R2P (2021, pp. 99-102).¹⁰ Both of these models aim to ensure that at least some actor can be assigned responsibility in the event of a crisis (Glanville, 2021, p. 99; Miller, 2001, p. 471). Recent work by Glanville and Pattison on just prioritisation likewise combines multiple principles for guiding how states should prioritise and discharge global responsibilities under resource constraints (2024, p. 8).¹¹ Special responsibilities, then, can be allocated on various bases, and hybrid approaches have the advantage of capturing more than one relevant ground of allocation. Even these hybrid models, however, require further elaboration in the context of the R-r2p, because the R-r2p must explain how colonial liability and present capacity are *related* on reparative grounds, not merely combined.

At first glance, allocating special responsibilities to protect on the basis of colonial injustice invites a primarily backward-looking responsibility. Centrally, the UK has outcome responsibility – which requires there to ‘have been a foreseeable connection between their action and that harm’ (Souter, 2022, p. 71) – since contemporary mass atrocity violence should have been a foreseeable outcome of entrenching ethnic conflict and fostering divisions in the colonial era. In this sense, the risk of future atrocities should have been foreseeable, even if not the specific atrocities themselves. While outcome responsibility is perhaps the soundest basis

⁹ The six means of allocation Miller identifies in his hybrid model are ‘moral responsibility’, ‘outcome responsibility’ (2007, p. 100), ‘causal responsibility’ (2007, p. 101), ‘benefit’, ‘capacity’ (2007, p. 103), and ‘community’ (2007, p. 104).

¹⁰ Glanville lists ‘culpability’ (2021, p. 99), ‘need’, ‘effectiveness’ (2021, p. 100), ‘optimal coverage’ (2021, p. 101), and ‘national interest’ (2021, p. 102), while also noting the relevance of ‘ties of history and kinship’ (2021, p. 100).

¹¹ Glanville and Pattison identify ‘effectiveness’, ‘disadvantage’, ‘national interest’, ‘culpability’, ‘urgency’, and ‘diversification’ as the core guiding principles (2024, p. 8). Several of these principles, particularly culpability, will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter

given the historical nature of colonial injustice discussed in the previous chapter, the UK also bears a secondary, less clear moral responsibility since the vast majority of decisions taken during the colonial era cannot be said to be ‘morally neutral or even justified’ (Miller, 2007, p. 100). These responsibilities are grounded in the principle of reparation; accordingly, causal responsibility is excluded from allocation *under the R-r2p*.

Basing responsibility in this context solely on backward-looking grounds faces the same challenges outlined above. There are good reasons to be sensitive to forward-looking complications: colonial linkages are likely to increase suspicions of the UK, thereby limiting its effectiveness. Accordingly, proponents of an “effectiveness” model would object that UK capacity should be deployed only where it is less likely to face resistance. In the context of colonial injustice, however, a capacity-based rationale cannot be separated from a backward-looking rationale; rather, the UK’s capacity to act derives in large part from exploitation of its former colonies. While the hybrid models discussed above *combine* different rationales, the R-r2p goes beyond this fusion by explaining their historical relation in this specific post-colonial context; more specifically, the UK’s capacity to act is implicated in the wrong being repaired. In other words, the R-r2p is not a hybrid model merely because it combines effectiveness and capacity with liability, but because it understands the UK’s present capacity as historically entangled with the colonial injustice that grounds reparative responsibility. Understanding how this might be achieved, however, requires further clarification as to why colonial injustice continues to generate contemporary responsibilities, and what reparation requires in this context.

3.2. Repairing Injustice: Locating Contemporary Responsibility

While Chapter 2 explored how the mechanisms of British colonialism were unjust, more conceptual clarity is necessary as to the *type* of British colonial injustice. Few would disagree that colonialism was an abhorrent injustice (Bufacchi, 2017, p. 202), for instance, but one might also argue that it is an injustice that has little relevance today since this injustice occurred in the past. Centrally, neither the victims nor perpetrators (for the most part) of this injustice are alive today, so calls for reparative responsibilities face the dual questions of why anyone is *owed* reparation if they were not themselves victim to the injustice, and why anyone should *make* reparation if they were not themselves perpetrators of the injustice. This section addresses these questions and defends assigning the contemporary UK state a reparative responsibility to protect. Centrally, contemporary agents may inherit responsibilities without necessarily inheriting guilt.

3.2.1. Historical, Enduring, and Structural Injustices

Colonialism is often understood as a “historical injustice”; that is, one that happened in the distant past (Thompson, 2002, x), often where the perpetrators and victims are dead (Blomfield, 2021, p. 1178; Winter, 2006, p. 356). On this understanding of colonial injustice, it is difficult to see what responsibility the people of the UK today should bear for crimes which in most cases they were not even alive for. Despite the historical link between past injustice and the mass atrocities

occurring in the present then, it may be difficult, or at least politically unfeasible, to make the case for assigning new reparative responsibilities. In this light, it is worth problematising the notion that colonial injustice is purely a remnant of the past. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that colonialism is in fact, to borrow Spinner-Halev's term, an 'enduring injustice' (2012, p. 10). As with historical injustice, Spinner-Halev is referring to scenarios where victims of the initial harm are no longer living, but where said harm has a connection to contemporary injustice (2012, pp. 10-12). The main flaw in viewing British colonial injustice as merely *enduring* according to Spinner-Halev's understanding, however, is that it is insufficiently conscious of how and why unjust structures connect past and present harms. Indeed, enduring injustice is not necessarily *structural* (nor is structural injustice necessarily enduring). An analysis of structural injustice has much to offer when it comes to understanding the nature of British colonial harm.

In recent years, there has been a growing shift towards understanding injustice as structural (Butt, 2021, p. 1161), thanks in no small part to Young's posthumous work popularising the concept. Young defines structural injustice as follows:

Structural injustice, then, exists when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them. [...] Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals

and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms

(Young, 2011, p. 52)

Structural injustice, as the name suggests, is thus an injustice that is precipitated *by* unjust structures. In some ways, the original colonial project does not map neatly onto Young's account, since empire involved direct domination and intentional subjugation as well as the cumulative effect of actions perceived as legitimate under accepted international rules and norms. Young's understanding is nevertheless useful in explaining how colonial injustice was authorised by an international order permissive of the colonial exploits of (particularly) Western European powers. Colonisation was not an exception to international rules and norms (though one might object *morally*) – it was sanctioned by international agreements, such as those arrived at through the 1884 Berlin Conference dividing Africa between European empires. These structures were not easily dismantled, which helps explain why, according to Page, colonialism has continued in spirit long after its formal end (2021, p. 1155). These structures continue to permit the domination of (and therefore denial of agency to) the populations of former colonial states.

Many scholars now consider colonial injustice to be structural (Lu, 2011, p. 262; Lu, 2017, p. 157; Lu, 2018, p. 4; McKeown, 2021, p. 1). British colonialism in particular might be defined as structural in that it entrenched 'relatively durable patterns of positional difference' (Owen, 2021, p. 1215) and cemented inequities (Thompson, 2002, viii; Walker, 2006a, p. 205). It has also been central to the 'institutional set-up of our societies (and international order)' (Nuti, 2019, p. 46). As stated in the previous chapter, the richest nations continue to be those in the Global

North, many of which are former colonial powers, while the poorest are often historical victims of colonialism in the Global South. Likewise, major institutional bodies such as the UNSC's P5, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank are dominated by states in the Global North, much to the detriment of many former colonial states (Bohm and Brown, 2020, p. 72; Collste, 2015, p. 32; Hutchings, 2010, p. 123; Lafont, 2015, p. 74; Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 319; Rotmann et al., 2014, p. 371). As such, colonial injustice remains politically and institutionally present, not merely historically influential.

In this sense, it is best to conceive of British colonial injustice as what Nuti terms a 'historical-structural injustice' (2019, p. 44). Centrally, this refers to those injustices which 'started in the past and are reproduced in a different fashion, even if the original form of injustice may appear to have ended' (2019, p. 44). In other words, the contemporary consequences of historical injustice should be understood as the *persistence and reproduction* of a historical wrong, rather than merely its after-effects. These injustices persist not because former colonies have been unable to overcome the legacies of the initial harm, but rather because those in a position to rectify the injustice have failed to do so. Accordingly, it is not just that colonialism had lasting consequences, but that colonial injustice is *ongoing*: past and present injustice are not merely connected but both aspects of a continued system of domination (Nuti, 2019, p. 160). The concept of 'global coloniality' (Langan, 2024, pp. 12-13), whereby the historical colonial hierarchy continues to be reproduced (Mariniello, 2025), helps us to understand how colonial injustice functions as a historical-structural injustice. Rather than understanding the mass atrocities occurring in former British colonies as merely having a causal link to British colonial injustice, we should understand the UK's failure to aid those at risk as a

contemporary reproduction of the broader colonial injustice identified in the previous chapter. How we conceive of colonial injustice has implications for the reparation required, given the various means available under its banner.

3.2.2. Reparation: Forward-looking and Backward-looking

As mentioned in this thesis' methodology, the concept of reparation is a slippery one, and its very meaning is subject to debate (McGary, 2010, p. 547). At a general level, reparation might be 'understood more broadly to mean accepting responsibility for a wrong and adopting some appropriate measure in response to this wrong' (Tan, 2008, p. 456). Likewise, Lu suggests that reparations are a method of 'settling accounts' (2017, p. 22), while Torpey suggests they exist for the purpose of 'making amends [... and] coming to grips with past injustices' (2003, pp. 3-4). Maier echoes this view when he argues that reparation revolves around 'moving on' from past injustices (2003, p. 301). What form of reparation, however, is best to make amends and settle accounts for British colonial injustice? Pablo De Greiff, a former UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, opts for a broad view by arguing that the 'most general aim of a program of reparations is to do justice to victims' (2006, p. 455). This broader understanding of reparations is also reflected in the literature (Bhabha, 2021, p. 9; Blomfield, 2021, p. 1179; Gifford, 2012, p. 84; Lu, 2007, p. 193; Tan, 2007, pp. 280-1; Torpey, 2003, p. 3), and so deciding on the right course is difficult. How, then, does one "do justice to victims" under the R-r2p?

"Justice" can be understood as either backward-looking or forward-looking (Nuti, 2019, p. 8; Song, 2021, p. 1; Srivastava and Muscott, 2021, p. 2; von Platz and

Reidy, 2006, p. 361). As with responsibility (see Section 3.1), these categories are not mutually exclusive. The benefits and limitations of each approach depend on the type of injustice that the reparations are intended to rectify; von Platz and Reidy, for instance, argue that the more temporally distant the injustice, the more forward-looking the reparative motivation becomes (2006, p. 360). It might thus follow that reparation for colonialism should be mostly forward-looking; however, as explained above, colonial injustice is not solely historical but enduring. While there is no set process of reparation (Barkan, 2000, p. 320), it might be sensible to draw a somewhat broad distinction between material and symbolic means, as De Greiff does (2006, p. 453). Likewise, reparation in international law is codified as involving the various means of restitution, compensation, satisfaction, and non-repetition (UNGA, 2005b, pp. 7-8). The first two of these are broadly material, while satisfaction is largely symbolic. These forms of reparation can be located broadly along a spectrum with backward-looking at one end (where restitution falls near) and forward-looking at the other (where satisfaction falls near). Non-repetition in this context means that colonial injustice must not be reproduced.

Restitution demands a complete restoration of victims to their state prior to injustice (UNGA, 2005b, p. 7). This seems an unfeasible type of reparation for colonialism given the historical nature of the injustice, and the impossibility of bringing about the complete reversal of misfortune that it demands (von Platz and Reidy, 2006, p. 361). As Walker argues, this type of reparation 'has never been meant to deal with either a massive scale of serious mayhem or a protracted and brutal subjugation' (2006b, p. 380). Compensation, on the other hand, seeks only to make up for a violation through 'a monetary or material good' (Souter, 2022, p. 12), though, despite a commonly-held belief to the contrary, is not exclusively financial

(Brennan, 2012, pp. 203-4; Collste, 2015, p. 118; Torpey, 2003, p. 3). Compensation is not entirely backward-looking, but also, as Maier suggests, an attempt to build a better future (2003, p. 298). Since colonial injustice is not purely historical but enduring, compensation involves alleviating these harms. Unlike the above modes of reparation, satisfaction is largely symbolic, more concerned with 'recognition of the violation' (Souter, 2022, p. 12). This is essential, given the importance of first acknowledging the past injustice before relationships between the harming agent and the harmed can be repaired (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5; Shelton, 2012, p. 112; Tan and Kumar, 2006, p. 325; Walker, 2006a, p. 28). This points to the importance that any effort to make reparation for colonial injustice be explicitly framed as reparative. As Walker argues, 'without that acknowledgment, reparative actions are charitable, compassionate, or generous, even dutifully so, but they do not "make amends."' (2006a, p. 191). Having clarified the concept of reparation and the forms it may take, it is now possible to consider why contemporary actors are the appropriate bearers of these reparative duties.

3.2.3. Locating Contemporary Responsibility

Understanding colonial injustice as exclusively historical increases the difficulty in allocating a rectificatory responsibility to the contemporary UK state, especially given the costs its citizens bear for discharging it (McKeown, 2024, p. 181). Using Nuti's historical-structural model, however, one can make the case that the UK inherits rectificatory responsibility because it has failed to assist former colonies in overcoming the path-dependent outcomes of colonialism, or, more accurately, failed to remove the obstacles facing such states in doing so through

their own efforts. In this sense, assigning reparative duties to the UK can be justified on the basis that it in many ways perpetuates injustice (Wittmann, 2012, p. 19).

While one should be wary of attributing guilt for historical injustices to those in the present, it is possible to allocate a kind of 'structural debt' (Nuti, 2019, p. 160) to the contemporary state should it fail to attempt to rectify injustices now. This is given even greater emphasis if the injustice is not only perpetuated but also continues to generate benefits for those who inherit the structure (Butt, 2009, p. 118).

Though there is some debate over the extent to which the UK benefited economically from colonialism, it is hard to deny that its Empire conferred upon the state many benefits: first and foremost, the power and privilege that came with ruling a quarter of the world. More than half a century since most of Britain's former colonies became independent states, however, one might argue that the UK no longer enjoys the benefits of its colonial exploits. Indeed, Barkawi and Brighton suggest that Britons today are 'no longer beneficiaries of the power and wealth' the Empire generated (2013, p. 1110). This claim is difficult to quantify, though it may seem intuitively true at face value: the UK has been experiencing relative decline for over a century, and it can arguably no longer claim to be a global power to the same extent.

The UK does, however, continue to enjoy many of the privileges secured through empire, including 'its status as a uniquely globalized economy, its trading strength, and [...] its significant political reach in terms of its diplomatic network and membership of key international bodies such as the UN Security Council' (Jackson, 2013, p. 114). This last benefit – its status as a permanent member of the UNSC (P5) – is particularly significant, especially given that France, another former colonial power, also holds a seat. As the UK and France are no longer global powers to the

same extent as they once were during the colonial era, their seats on the UNSC might be called into question as an archaic imperial legacy. In addition to its P5 membership, the UK is still the 6th richest nation in the world by GDP even in this period of relative decline (IMF, 2026). It seems unlikely that the UK will soon fade into obscurity and lose these advantages, or its position as a member of the P5. Since these benefits exist and can in large part be attributed to spoils gained through colonial injustice, the question that must be asked is what the UK is morally obligated to do with them.

Not only does the UK bear some reparative responsibility simply because the injustice of today is linked to the injustice of the past, but such responsibility is also heightened because it continues to reap the benefits of past injustice. Indeed, Tan, for instance, assigns responsibility for past injustices on this basis (2007, p. 296). The more difficult question, however, is what discharging such obligations entails. One possible view is that the purest act of reparation may be for the UK to cede all benefits gained from the colonial era. Shelton calls this type of act 'the real cost of full reparations' (2012, p. 97). While this argument seems intuitively just, it runs into a few insurmountable obstacles when faced with an injustice like colonialism.

First, there is a moral question on how much the UK should relinquish the benefits it enjoys, given the potential burden incurred by doing so. For instance, what should the UK do about its position on the P5? Should it surrender its seat so that another state could fill it? To do so would do little to challenge the status quo while disadvantaging the UK. Second, how can we truly ascertain what benefits are and are not products of colonial injustice? While the UK's position on the P5 seems to be linked to its imperial past, one cannot conclusively attribute its seat to this history. It is therefore unclear which advantages the UK could reasonably be expected to

relinquish. Accurately quantifying the benefits gained from colonial injustice so that the UK might relinquish them is a nearly impossible task fraught with countless counterfactuals. There is a reason, as Goldstone notes, that most proponents of colonial reparation argue in favour of only a partial transfer of advantages, so that 'the reparative burden is not too great upon those bearing the costs' (2024, p. 768).

Indeed, the challenges outlined above can be addressed not by the UK fully ceding the benefits gained from colonialism, but instead by doing what it can to employ them in the pursuit of reparation. For instance, rather than giving up its position on the P5, the UK might use this platform to advocate for reform to global political and economic structures such as the UNSC or the IMF, or to highlight the plights of its former colonies. The UK has demonstrated its willingness to be a penholder on atrocity prevention issues in the UNSC (Gifkins, Jarvis, and Ralph, 2019, pp. 1356-7) even if it has experienced some failures, such as with Myanmar (Ferguson, 2021, p. 245). The second challenge, that of uncertainty as to whether benefits are truly products of the British colonial era, is less problematic when one is not asking the UK to fully give up its privileges: the burden of proof in this scenario is lower. This matters because, as stated in Section 3.1, the UK's capacity to respond to crises stems from the same injustice that grounds its rectificatory obligations. The UK therefore has the capacity to effect change, but because that capacity was produced through colonial injustice, its responsibility to use it reparatively is heightened.

Alongside these reasons, reparative duties can be justified on the basis of what Miller terms 'consistency' (2007, p. 158): that is, the state which committed the injustice historically is the same state that exists today. In other words, we can understand consistency-based arguments as referring to continuity between the

historical perpetrator and the contemporary state. Even if the UK as a state construct has been reconstituted over time, it has never been fully reconstructed (Miller, 2007, p. 141). For instance, former British colonies or newly independent and sovereign states created in the aftermath of wars might not be held responsible for actions committed prior to independence since they were not free to act and the state itself did not truly exist. Some states have attempted to deny continuity to free themselves from guilt and the obligations that stem from it, such as how Austria eschewed responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime by adopting a narrative of helplessness (Bachleitner, 2021, p. 55).

The UK, however, cannot make this argument because the state has undergone no fundamental change since the imperial period. For the most part, there seems little incentive for the state to make this argument, since the UK's historical narrative is central to national identity (Guibernau, 2007, p. 3) and is actively advocated for by those Gluck calls 'custodians of the past' (1993, p. 65). A shared past and a shared identity arguably confer greater legitimacy on the nation-state (Humblebæk, 2018, p. 1) and thus make the maintenance of continuity politically useful. Though it is difficult to know to what extent the government retain complete control over the specifics of the historical narrative (Gustafsson, 2020, p. 1050), it does seem that the public, for the most part, also accept the idea of the UK as a continuous nation-state. Further, when participants were asked what made them proud to be British, the second most frequent answer given was "our history" (Ipsos, 2022). By casting the past as central to British identity, there is a 'proximity to decades and centuries gone before' (Campanella and Dassù, 2019, p. 57). The relevance of the colonial era to a consistency-based argument is given even greater

salience in that it is one of the most important periods in the UK's historical story, it is 'the golden age' of the 'nostalgic narrative' (Campanella and Dassù, 2019, p. 4).

Though one may challenge this argument on the basis that admiration for the British Empire has fallen in recent years, from 59% of those polled expressing this view in 2014 (Dahlgreen, 2014) to only 32% in 2020 (Smith, 2020), this number has remained relatively stable, with 33% expressing pride in 2025 (Smith, 2025). It is possible that people are still proud of what Britain *was* more broadly, even if not proud of what it *did* in terms of its colonial conduct. Likewise, a 2024 survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research found that 64% of the British public are still proud of the nation's history (Curtice and Scholes, 2024, p. 4). Regardless of whether the British public admire or abhor the record of the British Empire, the consistency argument depends only on acknowledgement that the UK's imperial past is part of the state's "historical identity". In other words, if one wishes to take some share in the historical achievements of the UK, then one must also condemn the injustices and be willing to shoulder its historical debts.

In understanding the UK of the imperial period and the UK of today not as distinct temporal entities but as a continually reformed and reimagined state, historically generated responsibilities persist: since the state failed to repay its debt historically, the debt remains today. Though these debts remain and are linked to the initial injustice, they too are reformulated since British colonialism is, as stated above, a historical-structural injustice. Indeed, the historical-structural nature of British colonial injustice means that it is not frozen in its original historical expression but recurs in modified forms. Current failures to respond to mass atrocities in the UK's former colonies represent a contemporary form of this injustice. As such, it follows that to rectify both the historical and contemporary injustices, the UK must

address these mass atrocity crimes using a reparative lens. Given that an approach to mass atrocity prevention informed by reparation for colonial injustice may not seem intuitive, it is worth now considering the potential reparative function of such an approach in three different senses: its role as compensation, satisfaction, and its potential to rehabilitate the character of the UK into a so-called 'good international citizen' (Souter, 2016, p. 798).

3.3. The R-r2p's Reparative Function(s)

While we have thus far established that the principle of reparation provides a sound *basis* for attributing a heightened responsibility to protect to the UK, it is now possible to demonstrate how meeting this responsibility *provides* a partial form of reparation. As noted above, reparation has been assigned a range of definitions, and the true cost of making "full" reparation is beyond the possibility of any approach to atrocity prevention. As already stated, this is not the purpose of the R-r2p; rather, its goal is to provide a *form* of reparation. The task at hand, then, is to consider how reparation might inform the UK's approach to atrocity prevention. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider the potential restitutive, compensatory, and satisfactory functions of the R-r2p. It is important to note that the examples here are not meant to be understood as those that will necessarily be included as measures under the R-r2p; rather, they are illustrative examples, demonstrating which types of actions under the R-r2p *could* hold reparative value. It is in the second part of this thesis that the reparative value of these features will be weighed.

It is first possible to dismiss restitution as a potential function of the R-r2p, since it involves restoring 'the victim to the original situation before the gross

violations [...] occurred' (UNGA, 2005b, p. 7). As explained above (see Section 3.2.2), restitution is impossible given the scale and temporal distance of colonial injustice. It is also far beyond the remit of the R-r2p regardless. Rather, a reparative approach to atrocity prevention likely has a much greater potential as a form of compensatory and satisfactory justice. The goal of compensation is to make up for a loss, not merely symbolically but materially: to improve the lives of those who are victims of injustice so as to ameliorate disadvantages, and where possible, offset harm. Compensatory justice thus has particular relevance to the R-r2p. The R-r2p might achieve this goal through measures typically associated with the R2P and associated norms of atrocity prevention such as capacity-building and development aid (McLoughlin, 2014, p. 426; Simon, 2012, p. 7; UNGA, 2013, p. 11; UNGA, 2018, p. 4; UNGA, 2019, p. 6), or through asylum (Souter, 2022, p. 56). Protection broadly can be understood as a form of reparation (Parra, 2011, p. 69). Various other methods of less explicit compensation may also be provided, such as military assistance or diplomatic backing (the merits of each of these measures will be discussed in the second part of the thesis).

As explained above, satisfaction is a largely symbolic means of reparation, provided through apologies, memorialisation, or condemnation of the injustice (Mills, 2019, p. 117). It is thus the minimum required of reparative process. The UK should of course offer an apology for colonialism, though this will not function as part of the R-r2p even if it does serve to make it more viable. A reparative responsibility to protect can however be interpreted as recognition of the violation, in that it requires the UK to acknowledge that its unjust colonial history has obliged the state to bear special responsibilities. In this light, explicit framing of atrocity prevention as a form of atonement for the colonial injustice it perpetrated might serve as a type of

satisfaction. Indeed, adoption of the R-r2p might also serve to emphasise the penitence and remorse of the UK, and might even play a role in conferring renewed legitimacy upon the state (Collste, 2015, p. 15; Winter, 2011, p. 799). In this sense, it is possible to ask whether the UK might benefit from making reparation other than in the potential to gain absolution.

Although the goal of reparation is first and foremost to make amends to the victim, and reparation should not be driven by the interests of the perpetrator, it is unrealistic to expect any act to be truly altruistic. Though the UK should not expect any benefits in the way of tangible or material gain, one way in which the UK might gain is through the restoration of relationships that the act of reparation makes possible. Many scholars view this as central to the process (von Platz and Reidy, 2006, p. 361; Wenar, 2006, p. 403). Indeed, for Walker, this is the true meaning of 'restorative justice' (2006a, p. 213). Likewise, both Hamber (2007, p. 265) and Satz (2007, p. 185) view the repairing of relationships as the single most important goal of any reparative process. Since historical injustice so frequently leads to a problem of trust between the victims of harm and its perpetrator (Spinner-Halev, 2012, p. 12), this type of 'moral repair', as Walker terms it (2006a, p. 23), is essential to the (re)establishment of faith and confidence in the UK. In this light, the adoption of the R-r2p might benefit the UK by establishing it as a state its former colonies can trust rather than suspect.

While this has benefits for both states and is a moral good in its own right, it also has the potential to further ease the implementation of the R-r2p. While Glanville and Pattison are right to highlight that injustice can lead to 'broken relational ties' which render reparative action less effective or even counter-productive (2024, p. 95), it is for this very reason that reparation *must* be prioritised.

Allowing broken relational ties to fester has consequences not only for the effectiveness of atrocity prevention on a bilateral basis but also for the legitimacy of its associated norms, especially given the persistent neocolonial perception. Indeed, Walker suggests that moral repair is necessary to prevent shared norms (especially those favoured by powerful, largely Western states) from falling into disrepair:

Where there are deeply embedded social patterns of disregard, subjugation, or violation among members of certain groups, the normative expectations of the powerful may be more or less understood as a rigged game by those dominated or oppressed

(2006a, pp. 26-7)

Others have likewise noted that historical injustice poses an obstacle to solving contemporary global challenges, since those who have inherited the harm are unlikely to trust those that committed it (Tan, 2007, pp. 287-8; Thompson, 2002, p. 25; Wenar, 2006, p. 404). Indeed, a failure to heal injustice (or at least address it) is a fundamental barrier to reconciliation, which in turn means that the consensus needed to ease the implementation of effective atrocity prevention (see Chapter 6) is harder to achieve. Walker argues that achieving this requires six tasks, though it is particularly worth noting the importance of restoring trust in shared moral standards by acknowledging the initial harm, and by convincing those harmed that the perpetrator is worthy of trust (2006a, p. 28). Diplomatic communication might be especially effective in bringing this reconciliation about, but deeds must also back up these words (McGary, 2010, p. 546; Satz, 2007, p. 185). As such, the fostering of trust might be best thought of as both a goal and a desired outcome of reparation.

On normative grounds, then, rebuilding trust between the UK and its former colonies might *make* atrocity prevention measures more effective, even if the scope is reduced. Indeed, given the general distrust of Western intentions when it comes to the application of the R2P (Cater and Malone, 2016, p. 291; Newman, 2016, p. 44; O'Hagan, 2015, p. 304), it follows that rebuilding this trust might ultimately increase the frequency at which the norm is successfully applied. As such, the UK benefits from rebuilding relationships with its former colonies (and beyond) in that it broadly serves to make the proliferation of its professed liberal ideals more plausible. By first making rectification to those directly affected by and in close association with the UK, it is possible for the state to present itself as one which is finally remorseful for its unjust past. Following this, the UK is then able to move on to constituting itself fully as a 'good international citizen' (Souter, 2016, p. 798) and potential ally of the Global South. In order to achieve this, then, the UK's adoption of the R-r2p should help in the development of 'relations characterized by equality, reciprocity, and respect' (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5). Although there is thus potential for rehabilitation via reparation, one should not get too caught up in *prioritising* the benefits of the UK over the moral obligation to make amends to the victims of colonial injustice.

The R-r2p is thus best understood as meeting the compensatory and satisfactory demands of reparation. Of course, reparation should also include 'guarantees of non-repetition' (UNGA, 2005b, p. 8), and this should be kept in mind when applying the R-r2p. This is best understood less as a *function* of reparation, and more of a constraint. In formulating the R-r2p, it is thus necessary to exercise caution in considering duties which might reproduce colonial modes of domination. Before establishing the specific duties the R-r2p entails, it is first necessary to

determine how the principle of reparation shapes *to whom* the UK owes a heightened, special responsibility to protect.

3.4. Identifying “Beneficiaries”

3.4.1. Reparation with Finite Resources

As explored previously, a central challenge facing successful atrocity prevention is selecting which cases to respond to ‘in a world of finite resources’ (Bellamy, 2014, p. 137). Assigning a special responsibility to protect to the UK on a reparative basis may serve to alleviate this in some manner, since it suggests that the UK ought to prioritise those to whom it bears a historical, imperial link, though even here the UK may still find itself with extensive reparative responsibilities. Although (since special responsibilities are more demanding) the R-r2p has the potential to increase the resources allocated to atrocity prevention, it is unclear how narrow the category of those who should benefit from the UK’s application of the R-r2p should be. While the most intuitive approach may be to limit the UK’s R-r2p obligations merely to the populations of its former colonies, what Achiume terms the ‘bilateral account’ (2019, p. 1561),¹² it is fair to question whether this goes far enough.

As colonialism was structural in nature and has shaped the world, one might ask instead whether the UK also bears, at the very least, a responsibility to protect populations in other post-colonial states – that is, whether the UK has ‘multilateral’

¹² Achiume develops the distinction between bilateral and multilateral in the context of state responsibility to admit migrants from former colonies, but it is conceptually useful here as a way of thinking about how far postcolonial responsibilities extend in relation to mass atrocity prevention.

obligations (Achiame, 2019, p. 1561). Going one step further, one might even argue that the UK has global obligations, that reparative action should not merely make amends to victimised states but also demonstrate the penitence of the UK and provide atonement: these can be understood as “universal” obligations. This section will consider each of these possible paths in turn, as well as paying brief attention to whether the UK is responsible to the post-colonial states, or to the individuals which reside within their borders. It is necessary to clarify at least briefly the *capacity* for the UK to meet its reparative obligations in order to contextualise this discussion. As argued above, the UK should not be expected to cede all benefits gained from colonialism since it is impossible to ascertain concretely what stems from where. For instance, it is difficult to firmly establish what degree of its wealth today has its roots in its colonial exploits. This thesis has instead argued that the UK has a heightened moral responsibility to use its (in part) ill-gotten wealth for rectificatory purposes and to do its best to share the benefits gained from unjust actions first and foremost among those to whom harm was done, but ultimately to the world at large. Even having argued this, however, it is necessary to outline the extent to which the UK should use its advantages for this specific rectificatory purpose.

The goal of atrocity prevention should be understood, following Glanville and Pattison, as only *one* global responsibility of states (2024, p. 68). As part of this responsibility, states must allocate resources and funding towards a particular ‘pot’ (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 68), and we might think of each global issue as having its own pot. As explained above, the R-r2p is not *all* that reparation demands; rather, reparation demands that more be done in regard to atrocity prevention *through* the R-r2p. In this sense, the R-r2p does not mean that the UK should devote excessive resources solely to making reparation to atrocity prevention, it simply

means that the UK should increase the amount of resources it devotes to this specific 'pot'. Alongside this, the UK should increase the amount it gives to other pots also, *on the basis of reparation*. As such, it is worth emphasising that the R-r2p falls alongside other reparative responsibilities, though the focus of this thesis is solely on atrocity prevention.

Even in light of this, however, it is worth querying to what extent the UK has a responsibility to make reparation even when doing so is to the detriment of its own population. It is morally justifiable for a state to safeguard the most basic rights of its population even while accepting reparative responsibilities (Souter, 2022, p. 139). Indeed, as Lu writes, 'nothing may justify a level of material reparations that would incapacitate a state' (2017, p. 231). This is given extra weight when contemporary populations are neither the perpetrators of the original injustice nor fully aware of their complicity in enduring structural harms. As such, although reparation should be prioritised as the *primary* principle of the R-r2p, it should not be pursued in cases where it would result in serious harm to the basic rights and vital interests of its own population, nor to the point of incapacitating itself to such an extent that it cannot continue to make reparation or prevent atrocities. Inconvenience or costs that do not meet this threshold do not provide a legitimate reason to avoid the duties demanded by the R-r2p.¹³ These considerations are best illustrated through a discussion of some of the potential measures discussed previously, starting with immediate means of protection.

¹³ Not all constraints on action are equally weighty: some, for instance, are contingent on the political climate. This thesis holds that there is a 'dynamic duty' to work to overcome such softer constraints (Gilabert, 2017, p. 122; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 159).

Immediate means of protection should be understood as those which seek to respond to (or even halt) ongoing atrocity crimes including, perhaps most controversially, military intervention. Although there is a question as to whether intervention can be genuinely reparative or pursued in the first place (as will be discussed in the following chapter), there is also a capacity-based logic as to why the UK could not, and should not, possibly intervene to prevent every mass atrocity scenario. The UK armed forces have around 147,300 personnel (Kirk-Wade, 2025, p. 4) and have declined in number in recent years (Kirk-Wade and Mansfield, 2023, p. 4). As stated by the GCR2P, there are 19 states with ongoing crises and a further 4 at imminent risk (GCR2P, 2026i). The number of troops required to respond to all of these crises would far exceed those available to the UK. While it is probable that other states would also contribute troops to these hypothetical interventions (in a scenario where intervention is both possible and likely), this is not guaranteed. On this basis, it might make more sense to question whether the UK has the capacity to respond even to a more limited set of colonial-linked cases. Indeed, one might argue that the UK's military capacity in part stems from its colonial history, and as such can be understood as a benefit that the state should use to the advantage of those whom it exploited. Even here it is easy to see how the UK would be readily overstretched not just in terms of personnel, but also in regard to the sheer quantity of resources required.

This hypothetical also assumes that the UK would be willing to increase its own vulnerability to attack by deploying its entire military. If reparation must be limited so as not to prevent excessive harm to the UK population, however, then the resources to pursue the R-r2p are constrained even further. The financial and logistical costs of carrying out these interventions, along with the potential deaths

involved, must also be weighed. If we are to accept that the UK is culpable as a state and nation for its own past, it seems that we must eschew more traditional cosmopolitan arguments in favour of “saving strangers” (Wheeler, 2000, p. 12), and concede that the UK also has responsibilities to its own populace (Beardsworth et al., 2019, p. 4). Accordingly, reparation raises the threshold of what the UK can be reasonably expected to risk, but it does not remove all limits. There is also a question as to whether, in holding the principle of reparation at the heart of the R-r2p, it is ever justified for the UK to *refuse* to meet any duties called for by those to whom it owes reparation. While agency should be honoured for the most part, it should not be held sacred: it is entirely possible that the demands of reparation might be too high so as to bring about novel harms.

Non-immediate and preventive means such as capacity-building also provide an illustrative example of how the pursuit of reparation might be detrimental to the welfare of the UK’s own inhabitants. Centrally, capacity-building has come to be understood as involving not only training and funding tied very narrowly to atrocity prevention, but also development aid. Despite becoming the first Group of Seven (G7) nation to promise to meet the UN’s recommendation (UNGA, 1970, p. 43) that states spend 0.7% of GNP on official development assistance (ODA) in 2013, the UK no longer meets this goal. Having already reduced the amount it spends on ODA to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) in 2020 (Loft and Brien, 2024, p. 4), the state has also announced plans to reduce this to 0.3% from 2027 onwards (Loft and Brien, 2025a). The UK may bear a moral obligation to increase the amount it spends on ODA in order to provide assistance to those parts of the world it has been instrumental in depriving, but it is not immediately clear to what percentage of GNI this should rise.

Increasing development aid likewise comes at the cost of drawing more funding from the finite ‘pot’, which in turn constrains what remains available for other obligations, including domestic ones, at a time when many of the UK’s institutions and apparatus are overstretched and the UK is experiencing comparative economic decline. Again, if we are to accept that the UK should not aim to fulfil its reparative obligations to the extent that it significantly harms its own populace, then spending must be limited: increased, but limited. Even if we take a narrower view of atrocity prevention, however, Bellamy suggests that its costs remain substantial (2022, p. 24). While one might claim that the UK has a responsibility to increase development specifically to target mass atrocities, this likewise means the UK may be failing to meet its other moral obligations. As such, while we can argue that the UK does bear a moral responsibility to prevent atrocity crimes, we must also be pragmatic and admit that it lacks the resources to be responsible *in every instance*. Having now attempted to outline the UK’s ability to meet its reparative obligations, it is now possible to discuss them with reference to a “spectrum of responsibility” approach.

3.4.2. Bilateral Obligations: Former Colonies and Associative Duties

Among the obligations demanded by the R-r2p, it is those which are bilateral in nature that are the most morally compelling. There are several reasons for this, following the guiding logic of the thesis thus far. Centrally, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, the UK has played a direct role in increasing the risk of (if not in some ways precipitating) mass atrocities in its former colonies. There are causal links between British colonial conduct and entrenched economic disadvantage, ethnic fragmentation, and institutional fragility, each of which exacerbates the threat of

mass atrocity violence. As such, it bears at the very least outcome responsibility for the mass atrocities occurring in its former colonies today, if not outright moral responsibility. The UK also continues to benefit from its historic exploitation of the populations of these states in particular, economically, politically, and structurally.

Beyond the core reparative grounds, there are additional reasons why the UK might have the strongest responsibilities to those it has bilateral relationships with. Ypi et al, for instance, suggest that states like the UK continue to bear *associative* duties to those it once colonised (2009, p. 104). Such duties are relational, based on not only historic links but also those which are economic, cultural, and political. Glanville has similarly suggested that former colonial powers may bear some responsibility to protect populations within their former colonies not only because of 'historical complicity', but also because they share a history (2021, pp. 94-5). Combined, each of these reasons demand a special responsibility to protect that is stronger than those owed to other agents. Although such responsibilities are likely to be often mediated through state structures, obligations are owed ultimately to those individuals and groups harmed by colonial injustice, not only the state itself.

While bilateral obligations under the R-r2p are likely to be sufficiently narrow so as to not overstretch the UK entirely (it has a moral obligation to meet at least these few duties), it is still worth considering which bilateral obligees in particular are worth prioritising. This thesis holds that the "paradigmatic" obligee is likely to be one where British colonial conduct was unjust and can be directly traced to contemporary perpetration of atrocity crimes. Each of the case study states selected in this thesis – Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan, and Nigeria – meet this criterion, and will therefore form the basis for the discussion of proposed measures in this thesis' second part. The paradigmatic obligee might also be one where the UK is *currently* contributing to

its precarity, making mass atrocity crimes more likely, either due to an unwillingness to act where it could bring about positive change or by enacting further injustice. The consequences of colonialism did not end with independence, nor did *coloniality* at large. In addition to ongoing coloniality, the UK also contributes directly to contemporary mass atrocity risk by, for instance, supplying arms to its former colonies (Stavrianakis, 2019, p. 60; Stavrianakis, 2023, p. 124) while failing to consider (or, worse, willingly ignoring) the potential misuse of such arms (Gegout, 2018, p. 213; Langan, 2024, p. 193).

Furthermore, the UK should prioritise those states with which it remains associated today in its foreign policy, especially in instances where association has its roots in the colonial era. One potential indication of how associative links have continued beyond the colonial period is the Commonwealth, and there is thus an argument that the UK should prioritise those states in the institution. While one could claim that this would reproduce the colonial relationship since there is a perception that the Commonwealth is merely a continuation of the British Empire (Jackson, 2013, p. 99), it is more accurate to say that it continues to exist in spite of the British rather than because of it (Mole, 2022, pp. 1-2; Shaw, 2008, p. 24). Indeed, the Commonwealth has in some ways helped to foster new forms of cooperation between the Global North and South (Ramphal, 1984, p. 373) and was particularly instrumental in challenging the apartheid regime in South Africa *in spite* of the desires of the British government under Margaret Thatcher (Shaw, 2008, p. 23).

One potential challenge to this associative argument is that states could merely cut ties when faced with criticism, as Zimbabwe did in 2003. Likewise, some states which are desperately in need of aid are not members, such as Myanmar. While one might claim that the UK should prioritise those who are receptive to its aid,

the UK ultimately owes reparation not only to willing states but to those groups within former colonies victim to mass atrocities. If faced with selecting only one mass atrocity scenario to respond to, the UK should thus select the “most paradigmatic” case. The bar for responding to atrocity crimes under the R-r2p, however, should not be so low as to allow the UK to justify inaction by protesting that it may become overstretched, nor should the UK be permitted to argue that it is waiting for a paradigmatic obligee. Ultimately, the UK certainly has a moral obligation to all those it can be linked to through the bilateral model. Prioritising meeting these obligations – or at least making meaningful efforts to pursue them – should come first, before considering the obligations owed to others. Narrowly focusing on these agents *only*, however, risks allowing the UK an excuse to avoid meeting its multilateral obligations – that is, to those broadly impacted by international colonial frameworks.

3.4.3. Multilateral Obligations: Other Post-colonial States

The justification for multilateral obligations is weaker, but this does not mean that they are entirely dispensable other than in certain, highly non-ideal circumstances. While not directly causative in the same way as bilateral obligations, there are still many good reasons to accept these responsibilities under the R-r2p. In her outline of why the UK has multilateral obligations (to all post-colonial/Global South states) even after independence, Achiume writes that the state ‘should be seen as neocolonially connected to, and in relationship of domination over, Third World citizens of nation-states formerly colonized by its European counterparts’ (2019, p. 1561). In other words, ongoing coloniality is perpetuated in part by the British and affects even those ‘the British did not themselves colonize’ (Achiume,

2019, p. 1561). Other proponents of the structural view of injustice have adopted similar views, with Lu arguing that dominant colonial powers helped to preserve ‘the unjust social structures of a colonial international system’ (2017, p. 127). Even Glanville and Pattison, who broadly eschew culpability as a sound basis for responsibility, suggest that duties allocated on the basis of colonial injustice might ‘extend beyond any given colonial system’ to others (2024, p. 92). This multilateral view of the nature of colonial injustice responds to its structural nature, as outlined in Section 3.2.

While Achiume draws a focus to contemporary coloniality, however, it is also worth acknowledging that historically the British Empire did not stand alone but rather operated in an international colonial framework in tandem with other imperial powers to subjugate states in the Global South. British colonialism was not a solitary injustice, but part of a joint enterprise. In this sense, the victims of British colonial injustice include not only those directly ruled under the flag of the Empire but also those less directly affected. For instance, one might point to British culpability in the colonisation of Africa by other European powers given its participation in the 1884 Berlin Conference, or to its willingness to cede much of the “Middle East” to France under the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. In this sense, the UK is partially responsible for mass atrocity crimes occurring in other post-colonial states, given that the same mechanisms of rule were also employed by other Western European colonial empires. A criticism of this multilateral model is that it threatens to overwhelm the UK with responsibility; even if it would be morally right for the UK to respond to mass atrocity crimes occurring in *all* former colonies, this is likely simply not feasible for the reasons outlined at the start of this section. This is at least somewhat mitigated, however, by the notion that this understanding also means

other former colonial powers have some responsibility for injustices associated with the British Empire also. It is worth ascertaining to whom the UK is most responsible on this reparative basis after it has discharged its bilateral obligations. As with the discussion of bilateral obligations above, duties are owed to individuals and groups, not solely states.

It is possible to prioritise multilateral obligations on a few different bases. First, one may select cases on the basis of historical implication and culpability for wider colonial structures, which may be established by investigating to what extent colonialism can be linked to contemporary mass atrocity crimes in non-British post-colonial states; for instance, how much historical culpability can be attributed to Belgium for the mass atrocities occurring in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today? Of particular relevance are cases where the UK participated in the division of ethnic groups between borders, given the salience of ethnic conflict to mass atrocity crimes. Second, the UK may wish to select beneficiaries based on the probability of success. Indeed, it makes sense that if it is difficult to establish concretely UK culpability for the actions of others, then the UK should instead prioritise those cases where it can make the most difference. This follows Glanville's criteria for assigning responsibility, specifically on the basis of 'need' and 'effectiveness' (2021, p. 100). Likewise, the UK should prioritise responding to multilateral cases which would otherwise be ignored, so as to achieve 'optimal coverage' (Glanville, 2021, p. 101). While each of these criteria has normative value, culpability should be given more weight than effectiveness due to the focus on ensuring *reparation*. Because multilateral obligations are weaker and more diffuse than bilateral ones, the UK should largely prioritise first those mass atrocity crises where the historical colonial link is most clearly implicated, and then those where it can make the most

meaningful difference. As Souter writes, however, reparation is not absolute and should not override all other considerations (2022, p. 161).

Finally, the UK may wish to prioritise those who are either deeply affected by ongoing coloniality which can be traced to the colonial era, or to those with whom it has close associative ties now. These links may be established through various means. A direct link between the British colonial era and associations with states which were not former colonies may come in the form of Commonwealth membership. Indeed, if participation in the Commonwealth can be understood as strengthening associative obligations on a bilateral basis, then it stands to reason that it may strengthen those on a multilateral basis also. As such, multilateral obligations may be owed to states such as Mozambique or Rwanda, both of which are members while not being former British colonies, on an associative basis. Associative duties do not generate the strongest multilateral claim on their own: they may, however, strengthen pre-existing multilateral claims. These multilateral obligations, though weaker than those of a bilateral nature, broaden the reparative demands of the R-r2p. There remains, however, a question of whether reparation for colonial injustice also demands responsibilities *beyond* this in the form of universal obligations.

3.4.4. Universal Obligations: Global Citizenship and Structural Reform

It is also possible that the UK may owe obligations to all those at risk of mass atrocity crimes whether in a post-colonial state or not. However, if we locate responsibility along a spectrum, it makes sense that after meeting its bilateral and multilateral obligations (if it can), it would likely be almost impossible to achieve any

more, given the exploration of the UK's capacity above. This does not mean that the moral rationale does not exist, but simply that – given this practical impossibility – the reparative obligation is higher in the former context than the latter, and consequently should be prioritised. Indeed, there are far fewer causal links between British colonialism and mass atrocities occurring in those states which did not fall under the global colonial framework. As such, the UK does not have a *reparative* responsibility to all states because of its unjust colonial history. In other words, the UK should not be expected to respond to every ongoing atrocity crime.

While one might argue that the UK should always prioritise preventing the atrocity crime where it has the highest likelihood of success, this may be challenged on the basis that there are likely other actors who have a far higher likelihood of success given the UK's comparative decline in military and economic power – the UK is unlikely to be the most effective actor. Under very specific circumstances where the UK is likely to be the most effective, or in instances where other capable actors are unwilling to act, the UK should pursue its global responsibilities under the R-r2p. As stated above, the principle of reparation should not mean that all other considerations are ignored, and as such it might make sense to prioritise a 'significantly needier' case even if the reparative obligation of the UK is comparatively low (Souter, 2022, p. 161). The UK might, however, be more effective *in* bilateral contexts. A shared history, continued association, and a common language could do much to improve the likelihood of success of any one measure. Effectiveness alone, however, should not be considered the main criterion for action. The R-r2p remains reparatively grounded, but reparation in this thesis is also partly remedial; the point is not that remedial considerations disappear entirely, but that they do not displace the higher reparative priority. It seems reasonable, then, for the

UK to instead use its political judgement to focus on cases where it is most likely to make up for past harms it has some share of the blame in, rather than to attempt to serve a purely remedial purpose which might be better achieved by other actors. The UK's universal obligations under the R-r2p might instead be better understood as part of an approach that signals its atonement and willingness to make reparation to both its former colonies and the broader world.

Such an approach involves enacting change which aims to bring about a fairer and more equitable world for all, not just to repair the status of its historical victims – though, of course, the two processes are interconnected. In this light, the universal elements of the R-r2p for the UK may involve advocating for structural reforms to the international system, to build a better world (Táíwò, 2023, p. 3), and a more general willingness to, as stated above, reconstitute itself as a good global citizen. This might entail increasing international development aid back to 0.7% at the very least and perhaps beyond, even if not specifically aimed at its former colonies. It might also entail adopting a much more inclusive and lenient asylum policy, just as Germany did as atonement for the crimes of the Nazi era (Joppke, 1998, p. 122). While the measures taken here might appear general rather than rectificatory, they are still rooted in reparative principles. Likewise, as McKeown asserts, there is merit to being over-inclusive rather than under-inclusive (2024, p. 204). Having established this spectrum of responsibility, it is worth finally recapping and clarifying the principles guiding the implementation of measures under the R-r2p.

3.5. R-r2p: Guiding Principles

Any possible measure included under the UK's R-r2p should be weighed against the following five guiding principles, in accordance with the logic established in the previous two chapters:

- *Reparative Grounding*: the duty can be assigned on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice
- *Non-domination*: the duty will not reproduce colonial modes of domination
- *Agency*: the duty empowers populations facing said action and fosters local ownership
- *Reparative Effectiveness*: the duty is likely to repair the situation (the specific mass atrocity scenario) by addressing colonial harm(s)
- *Sustainability*: in meeting the above principles, the duty will, on balance, not pose too significant an obstacle to future efforts to make reparation or prevent atrocities

Together, these principles help to determine the conditions under which any particular measure of atrocity prevention can be considered a legitimate expression of the R-r2p. It is worth briefly providing a greater justification for each of these principles, summarising the normative foundations of this framework.

The *reparative grounding principle* is the baseline which all measures must meet and has two primary requirements. First, it should be specifically linked to rectifying an injustice that the UK caused or contributed to. For instance, a proposed measure should seek to address the original colonial injustice, its enduring structural legacies, or the harms that stem from it. The purpose of the R-r2p is explicitly reparative, not merely humanitarian. Second, it ought to be morally justifiable to

allocate the duty to the UK on the basis of past colonial injustice. In other words, if a measure is especially high-cost (such as humanitarian intervention), then it must not be more demanding in its severity than the original injustice. As Section 3.3 demonstrated, reparative duties under the R-r2p are compensatory and satisfactory; it is impossible to make restitution for colonial injustice. Reparative duties should not demand that the UK cede all its benefits given the difficulty in ascertaining which stem from injustice. Both these elements must be met for a duty to satisfy this principle; failing this, possible measures stumble at the first hurdle because they lack a reparative moral basis.

The second and third guiding principles reflect the importance of empowerment to the R-r2p. Each of these principles directly respond to the fact that British colonialism was unjust not only because of the legacies it left, but also because of the ways in which it was conducted. While acknowledging the interdependence of these principles, it is important to highlight the distinction between them. As argued in Section 3.2, as a historical-structural injustice, British colonialism is an example of domination under Young's definition since it denied local populations 'the means to develop and exercise their capacities' (2011, p. 52). The *non-domination principle* refers specifically to a need not to mirror colonial modes of rule and domination, so as to meet the non-repetition requirement of reparation and also to avoid a perception that the R-r2p is in any way neo-colonial. In other words, this second principle is more concerned with what the UK ought *not to do*. It is directly concerned with the non-repetition element of reparation. This principle is relevant not only to the reproduction of colonial relations between former coloniser and the formerly colonised, but also to the reproduction of colonial power *generally*. Any measure should be pursued with the intention of building relationships

‘characterized by equality, reciprocity, and respect’ (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5).

Measures which violate the *non-domination principle* are likely to pose an obstacle to building trust in the UK.

Related to this, then, is the *agency principle*. This criterion asks that any measure under consideration aligns with the interests of local populations (ideally, explicitly). Aside from an intentional domination of colonial populations, the previous chapter also demonstrated that in many cases the misguided paternalism of the British colonial administrators denied the agency of local populations, assuming an incapability to take care of themselves. In this sense, because colonialism *denied* agency, reparation for this injustice ought to help restore it. In many cases, those facing mass atrocities are not merely helpless victims but agents who ‘play a role in preventing and indeed responding to or resisting atrocity crimes’ in their own right (Dunford, 2025, p. 621). In this sense, satisfying the *agency principle* should not be conceived of as “giving” agency to vulnerable populations, but as using the UK’s resources to *empower* such groups. Agency, as will become even clearer in the following chapters, has a particular relevance to all modes of reparation generally in order to meet the requirements of satisfaction. As with the *non-domination principle*, empowering populations in a way which gives them agency is likely to help to rebuild trust. Ensuring that these two principles are met is central to addressing the research puzzle at the heart of this thesis.

The previous three principles are arguably more backward-looking, in that they are informed by – and concerned with – the past conduct of the UK. At the same time, measures should not be pursued *only* because they meet these principles. Considerations must also be made as to the likelihood that a measure will serve to repair the specific mass atrocity scenario it targets. In this light, the

reparative effectiveness principle adds a forward-looking constraint. While linked to the discussion of the merits of effectiveness above, this principle differs in its focus on whether a measure meaningfully addresses atrocity risks as generated by the UK's colonial conduct, rather than whether it serves as effective atrocity prevention broadly. The use of overwhelming force, for instance, is likely to be effective but is not necessarily *reparatively effective*. As explored in Section 3.3, the R-r2p serves a compensatory purpose – it must address the enduring structural injustice populations in former colonial states face. The capacity limitation discussed in Section 3.4.1 is also relevant here, since finite resources demand a prioritisation of those measures most likely to make reparation. This principle is therefore likely to be most readily satisfied in bilateral contexts (as determined in Section 3.4.2), though still applies in multilateral and universal contexts. While symbolic gestures are central to reparation, this principle ensures that measures avoid becoming *solely* symbolic.

The final guiding criterion, the *sustainability principle*, must also be considered even if the others are met. Under this principle, a proposed measure must not be so demanding that it exhausts the UK's capacity, or future ability, to make reparation or prevent atrocities. The constraint of finite resources, as determined in Section 3.4.1, means that excessively costly measures reduce the ability to act elsewhere. Likewise, since the nature of colonial injustice means that the total cost of full reparation is incalculable, it would be better to ensure lasting compensation (see Section 3.2). This principle invites a pragmatic approach to the measures available. Under this principle, measures must only be pursued so far as they preserve the capacity to make reparation (though a hypothetical “ideal scenario” where all capacity might be divested will be considered in the following chapter). A measure which violates this principle is likely to challenge the reparative grounding of the R-

r2p. This principle can also be understood to mean that a measure must not engender distrust of mass atrocity efforts *globally*. Accordingly, an unsustainable measure is one which, for instance, imposes disproportionate costs, undermines trust, and limits the legitimacy of reparation and protection. This principle's purpose is not to permit the UK to evade implementation of the R-r2p, but only to ensure that fulfilling it is not self-defeating. Combined, these five principles provide the evaluative framework against which possible measures under the R-r2p must be determined. This framework structures the analysis that follows in the rest of the thesis.

3.6. Conclusion

The R-r2p is best understood as offering a form of satisfaction or compensation for British colonial injustice. It is owed by the UK and its citizens because British colonial injustice is enduring and structural – that is, it continues to pervade structures to this day – and because the state continues to benefit from said injustice. Regardless of whether these benefits persist, however, the UK still bears some responsibility. This is because the R-r2p is largely forward-facing even if it is informed by the past. It is pursued with the intention of building not only a better future for the UK's former colonies and the world at large (especially those at risk of mass atrocities), but also of rebuilding trust between the UK and those victim to its injustice and even potentially rehabilitating the state into a “good international citizen”. These goals remain normatively compelling regardless of whether one wishes to “blame” the current inhabitants of the UK – one must attribute them responsibility, even if not finding them guilty. The R-r2p also generates responsibilities to a range of actors for the UK, though most fundamentally to the

state's former colonies (bilateral beneficiaries). Having established why the R-r2p exists, why the UK bears a moral duty to apply it, and to whom the concept is addressed, it is now possible with the five principles outlined above to begin to answer what measures the R-r2p entails. These principles must structure the implementation of the R-r2p.

This is the focus of the second, more practice-based half of the thesis. The following three chapters each concern the potential toolkit of the R-r2p, both in general terms and with specific reference to each of the case studies outlined previously. This discussion begins first with the most immediate measures before moving upstream towards those measures which, while unlikely to halt ongoing mass atrocity crimes, have the potential to reduce the likelihood that they will occur. As such, the following chapter begins first with how the UK might best meet the demands of immediate protection under the R-r2p, especially in the context of the *sustainability principle* and the *non-domination principle*. In particular, caution must be exercised in the possible use of military measures; instead, it might be wise to consider other methods of immediate protection. Following this, Chapter 5 then turns to preventive measures, specifically querying whether humanitarian aid, capacity-building, and development assistance might be a more appropriate means of meeting the obligations of the R-r2p. The *reparative effectiveness principle* is of particular relevance here. The final chapter of this half of the thesis will consider the potential role of diplomacy in the R-r2p, including how support for atrocity prevention might be facilitated through dialogue. In this chapter, as in the previous two, the *agency principle* will be of paramount importance.

PART II

4. Immediate Protection: Offensive, Defensive, and Pacific Means

Almost three years since the start of the Sudanese civil war, two-thirds of the population are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, while more than 150,000 people have been killed amid widespread atrocities (Brown, 2025). The time for preventive measures has passed – immediate action must be taken to protect. The crisis in Sudan, in particular, highlights the scale of immediate risk in contexts shaped by the UK's colonial legacies. Fundamentally, the UK's history of colonial injustice suggests that it owes its former colonies (primarily, but also all former colonies and potentially the wider world) a debt, and that this debt means the UK ought to do *more*, not *less*, when it comes to stopping mass atrocities from occurring in its former colonies. The question remains as to what should be done to provide protection to these groups, particularly when it comes to selecting measures that are both effective and reparative.

These measures might be understood as “pillar three-style tools”, in line with that pillar of the R2P; that is, those which aim to provide a ‘timely and decisive response’ (UNGA, 2009a, p. 2). The R2P has not, however, provided a satisfactory answer as to what these measures ought to be. In particular, while one of the primary intentions of those championing the norm was to circumvent the need for unauthorised humanitarian intervention (Evans, 2016a, p. 260), many scholars have noted that it has not succeeded in moving the argument forwards enough (Ingiyimbere, 2017, p. 97; Paris, 2014, p. 572; Welsh, 2012, p. 108). Indeed, as scholars have noted, the R2P is often still conflated with humanitarian intervention (Bellamy, 2014, p. 175; Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 375), and much of the

literature on the norm concerns military aspects covered under its third pillar even if it retains a wide array of available measures (Illingworth, 2024, pp. 182-3). For this reason, many states continue to express scepticism of the R2P in practice even if supporting it in theory (Glanville, 2021, p. 37; Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 307; Nuruzzaman, 2022, p. 4; Souter, 2016, p. 806). Regardless of the legality or political viability of intervention (both within the confines of the R2P norm and outside it), questions remain as to the moral basis of intervention intended to prevent groups from falling victim to mass atrocity crimes. Recapitulating the entirety of this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, though it is necessary to ask whether the moral basis for intervention is heightened by obligations the UK owes stemming from its history of colonial injustice, as outlined in the previous two chapters.

In that the R-r2p demands heightened responsibilities, one must ask whether this means the UK should actually be intervening *more often* in its former colonies to prevent mass atrocities, and in what way (if any) this serves as a form of reparation. At the same time, this would entail the UK waging the types of wars which have often been called neo-colonial (Gegout, 2018, p. 4), even in the same language that was used to justify colonial expansion (Ingiyimbere, 2017, p. 115; Mamdani, 2010, pp. 55-6). The research puzzle at the heart of this thesis is at its most difficult in this: the UK is obligated to do more in stopping mass atrocities occurring in its former colonies, which might entail military intervention, but at the same time military intervention would likely violate the principle of non-repetition present in reparative duties. The very injustice that means the UK has higher responsibilities also means it is unwise and unpalatable for it to meet them. This is, to borrow Fabre's term, 'the paradox of intervention' (2012, p. 190). Accordingly, it is also necessary to query whether there are alternative immediate means of protection ("pillar three-style

measures”) which are more appropriate to pursue under the R-r2p, or if intervention stands as the best and most effective option.

This chapter concerns whether there are any scenarios in which the UK should use military means to stop mass atrocities as a form of reparation for colonial injustice (especially *in* its former colonies), as well as what other means of immediate protection exist as an alternative. Central to its structure is Fabre’s paradox, and whether there are other ways for the UK to support military intervention (or use its military capabilities in a less-direct way) to block mass atrocity crimes. The chapter will assess the various measures against the five R-r2p principles established in Section 3.5. In doing so, this thesis adopts the working assumption that any intervention the UK conducts *would* (hypothetically) be waged with the right humanitarian and reparative intention. While in reality this is not guaranteed and is an idealistic assumption, it is necessary for the normative argument of this thesis. Having clarified this, the structure of the chapter is as follows, moving from the most coercive measure to the least coercive.

First, this chapter considers whether the UK can ever be morally justified in conducting an unauthorised humanitarian intervention beyond the confines of the UNSC in its former colonies. Particular attention will be paid to whether humanitarian intervention can be both justified and reparative if the UK is being invited to intervene by groups with more perceived legitimacy than those committing the mass atrocity crimes, with reference to the government-in-exile in Myanmar. Following this, the next section considers again whether military intervention can serve a reparative function, but this time under the R2P and thus with UNSC permission, using Sudan as a hypothetical intervention scenario. The chapter then turns to what role the UK might play in cooperative military assistance/intervention under the R2P – that is,

military means at the wishes of the state. The reparative potential of these measures will be illustrated using Nigeria, as it is the only case study wherein the government is failing primarily because it lacks capacity. Further to this, the relevance of cooperative military assistance will be considered in terms of weapons transfers (and other forms of support) to vulnerable groups with the intention of improving their ability to defend themselves. In the final section on the use of force, this chapter will explore whether so-called “safe zones” or other primarily protective forms of intervention might provide a better alternative than intervention, cooperative or otherwise.

Ultimately, while military intervention in the UK’s former colonies might be justifiable as a means of last resort (the most non-ideal scenario), especially when invited by vulnerable groups with more perceived legitimacy, this chapter makes the argument that it fails to consistently or sufficiently meet the guiding principles of the R-r2p. Any military intervention which does take place must also commit to the establishment of safe zones and the limitation of further displacement, guided for the most part by a “pacifist ethos” (Moses, 2019, p. 228; Moses, 2024, p. 214) even if not dogmatically attached to it. Even accepting the non-ideal potential for the use of force, this chapter concludes that, when faced with the immediate threat of mass atrocity crimes, the UK’s finite resources would be better spent on protecting refugees in ways that are more effective, more morally and legally palatable, and are less likely to harm the rest of the reparative project. Such actions include the non-coercive means of granting entry and residence to refugees on British soil, and empowering refugees to choose their own place of sanctuary by ‘provision of compensation to the refugee’s chosen state of asylum’ (Souter, 2022, p. 125).

4.1. Unauthorised Humanitarian Intervention

The degree to which different military means of mass atrocity prevention are likely to be perceived as normatively and politically contentious differs. The most controversial is also the most legally illegitimate under international law and might be understood as “unauthorised humanitarian interventions”. Such interventions have a long history, take place beyond UNSC oversight, and are often suspected as waged by those with dubious humanitarian intentions (Hermanson, 2018, p. 139). States have even explicitly used the language of the R2P in attempts to whitewash their ill-intentioned interventions, as in the case of Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia and 2014 invasion of Ukraine (Pupcenoks and Seltzer, 2021, p. 757). Given the suspicions of what is an internationally illegal form of intervention, it seems almost intuitive to say that unauthorised humanitarian intervention *should not* be included within the UK’s atrocity prevention toolkit under the R-r2p. The question here, however, is largely normative rather than legal. It is also true, for instance, that the goal of immediate protection might demand foregoing the waiting period often associated with UNSC authorisation. To suggest that the UK ought to stand aside because of this arguably contradicts the reparative logic established in the previous chapter.

In unpacking this dilemma, close attention must be paid not only to the guiding principles as the core evaluative framework, but also to the concepts inherent to the just war tradition of just cause, right intention, reasonable prospects of success, and last resort (Norman, 1995, p. 118). In regard to the first two requirements, unauthorised humanitarian intervention must be both primarily reparative and, as Pattison argues, *primarily* humanitarian (2010, p. 28), even if not exclusively so. The two motivations are linked – an intervention which is guided by

selfish intentions is unlikely to be reparative. Failing to meet this requirement renders the measure unwise from the outset. As such, this chapter operates on the assumption that, in carrying out the hypothetical intervention(s) explored below, the UK does have the right intentions. Furthermore, “unauthorised intervention” may be conducted as part of a wider coalition; as such, this section does not assume that the UK is only ever acting unilaterally. The merits and pitfalls of unauthorised humanitarian intervention will be illustrated here with a focus on Myanmar. Since intervention in this state is highly unlikely to ever receive UNSC authorisation given China’s objections to international interference in its affairs (Charbonneau, 2021), Myanmar is the case study most likely to necessitate unauthorised intervention. It is worth first demonstrating that a responsibility to undertake unauthorised intervention can be assigned to the UK on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice, thereby meeting the *reparative grounding principle*.

4.1.1. Reparative Grounding: Accepting Risk

As emphasised in the previous two chapters, it is clear that the UK can be held responsible to some extent for mass atrocities occurring in its former colonies, as these crimes have often been made more permissible – and groups more vulnerable – because of its imperial conduct. Myanmar perhaps provides the most compelling example of a former British colony whose crises can be linked to the UK’s colonial past. As explained in Chapter 2, the UK bears a particular responsibility to the Rohingya due to its actions placing the ethnic group into a position of enduring insecurity. The UK reneged on its promise to the group of a separate independence (Mukherjee, 2019a, p. 246; Zahed, 2021, p. 442) despite heightened tensions

between the group and the (then) marginalised Burman majority, thereby not only failing to protect the group *historically*, but also *exacerbating* their precarity.

The crisis the Rohingya face today is existential: they are denied access to the state's citizenship regime (Rhoads, 2023, p. 38), are victim to frequent acts of violence which have intensified since the military began its genocidal campaign in late 2016, and have been called the most persecuted minority group in the world (UNHRC, 2017). Today, the majority of the Rohingya population no longer lives in Rakhine State, or even Myanmar, but rather in refugee camps in Bangladesh (most famously Cox's Bazar). The junta has succeeded in its ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya population (GCR2P, 2026a).¹⁴ The scale and intensity of the mass atrocity crime is not in doubt, nor is the argument that the UK state is culpable to at least some extent for the precariousness of the Rohingya due to its colonial-era conduct. While one might argue that the UK only has this responsibility to a minority of the population (the Rohingya ethnic group), this is not the only group in Myanmar vulnerable to mass atrocity crimes; rather, as part of the ongoing civil war, the military junta have perpetrated myriad identity-based mass atrocities on numerous different bases. As established in Chapter 2, these, too, might be traced to British colonial conduct.

It is necessary to clarify whether, based on the context provided above, unauthorised intervention meets the foundational *reparative grounding principle* established in the previous chapter. This principle demands that the duty can be assigned on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice, and that the cost of the duty

¹⁴ It is worth emphasising that the persecution of the Rohingya is not solely perpetrated by the military, but also by paramilitary groups and Buddhist extremists (Bakali, 2021, p.64). The ongoing genocide against the Rohingya also began at a time when the junta was not the sole power in Myanmar.

does not exceed the original injustice so as not to be excessively or unfairly demanding. This cost is particularly acute when considering duties that are physically *dangerous* – it is worth briefly illustrating this. Consider a scenario where Agent *A* rushes across a train station, shoving other bystanders out of the way, and accidentally pushes Agent *B* onto the tracks. One would expect *A* to then do what they can to help *B* get out of the way of oncoming trains, short of jumping onto the tracks and throwing themselves in the path of the train. If *A* has willingly put *B* in harm's way for *A*'s own gain, *A* consequently has a responsibility to protect *B* even if doing so means that *A* might also be harmed. This is given added weight when *A* could/should have foreseen the consequences of their actions and has the capacity to face the harm (especially if said capacity stems from injustice). In this light, given the scale, nature, and consequences of colonial injustice (in Myanmar and more broadly), unauthorised humanitarian intervention is *not* too costly, even if its cost is by no means small. Even unauthorised humanitarian intervention, then, can meet the *reparative grounding principle* in certain circumstances. As such, other less demanding military measures are likely to also meet this principle.

4.1.2. Reparative Effectiveness: Forceful Protection

In considering the merits of including unauthorised intervention as a measure under the R-r2p, it must serve a clear reparative purpose by meeting the other four guiding principles. In particular, unauthorised intervention must meet the *reparative effectiveness principle*, which demands that any measure under the R-r2p is likely to help repair the mass atrocity scenario. Alternatively, it must, at the very least, not reinforce colonial injustice and place vulnerable groups in a position of greater

vulnerability, doing unto them *more harm*. It is difficult to accurately measure the likelihood that military intervention, unauthorised or not, would be able to fully help prevent vulnerable populations in Myanmar from becoming victim to mass atrocity crimes. Indeed, scholars have expressed a scepticism about the capacity for any military intervention to be truly successful in this regard (Heller, 2021, p. 613; Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 319). One might argue, however, that it is the only option left. Prevention has proved a failure, and it is much too late for many of the tools available under this banner (the merits of prevention will be discussed in the following chapter). Timely and decisive action through the UNSC, as called for under the R2P (UNGA, 2005a, p. 30), failed to manifest when the failure of prevention became so obviously apparent in 2017. There is also little indication that it will manifest in the future, despite the fact that the plight of the Rohingya and other vulnerable groups in Myanmar has not abated to the extent that such action is no longer necessary.

In this light, there is an argument to be made that even action beyond the UNSC would help to improve the situation of vulnerable groups in Myanmar, even if it is not perceived as legally legitimate. Military action might be able to protect vulnerable groups from the junta in their campaigns to ethnically cleanse and terrorise vast swathes of the country resistant to its rule. Many of the mass atrocity crimes committed in Myanmar are done so in the military's 'scorched earth campaigns' in civilian areas (GCR2P, 2026a), and it thus holds that obstructing these campaigns should serve to reduce the intensity and frequency of mass atrocity crimes. If the UK is willing to invest enough military resources, and the junta is not propped up by other regimes, then it should be possible for the UK to at least substantially *reduce* the number of mass atrocity crimes even if not to end them

outright. The deployment of troops might not only play an active role, but also serve a passive deterrent function – if the perpetration of mass atrocities seems too costly, they might be avoided. At the same time, it is also possible that invading might prevent other atrocities while giving rise to others. On balance, however, it is possible (but perhaps not probable) for unauthorised humanitarian intervention to meet the *reparative effectiveness principle*, though the costs required to ensure this are substantial.

4.1.3. Neo-coloniality and Limited Sustainability

Even if we accept that unauthorised military intervention could put an end to the mass atrocities, however, there are arguments to be made that such a measure fails to meet the *non-domination principle*, the *agency principle*, or the *sustainability principle*. These principles cannot be treated as distinct from one another in considering the reparative value of unauthorised military intervention, since it is in its violation of the *non-domination* and *agency* principles that its *sustainability* becomes suspect. Centrally, it is likely that any unauthorised military intervention would call into question the UK's other efforts to make reparation and would increase distrust among states already wary of the UK's perceived predilection for illegal humanitarian interventions (Barkawi and Brighton, 2013, p. 1122; Newman, 2021, pp. 633-4). Although we are largely concerned with the normative and reparative potential of unauthorised intervention, not its illegality, the latter has implications for the former. Should the UK choose to break international law, regardless of its intentions, there are likely to be consequences for its later reparative efforts.

It is unsurprising that unauthorised humanitarian intervention is often perceived as neo-colonial, given the history of such interventions as justification for colonial expansion (Ingiyimbere, 2017, p. 63). This is heightened by the fact that the capacity of the UK (as well as other colonial powers) to conduct interventions partly stems from a material capability which itself has roots in the unjust exploitation which took place during the colonial era. Demonstrations of military power in a former colony thus reproduce colonial modes of domination superficially if not substantively. There is an argument to be made that this is simply an issue of framing. Central to any violation of the *non-domination principle*, then, are the perceived intentions behind unauthorised humanitarian intervention. While deployment of (superior) military forces on the ground in a former colony is an echo of the colonial period, it might be possible to convince the international community of its legitimacy. As explained above, this chapter is operating on the assumption that any future intervention conducted by the UK would be driven by primarily humanitarian intentions. At the same time, however, it is impossible to guarantee that the international community will readily accept the state's intentions as such.

Under the R2P (and international law more broadly), the only legal humanitarian intervention is that which is authorised by the UNSC (Evans, 2024, p. 327). As such, legal approval can be met with the authorisation from all members of the P5. There are good reasons to be sceptical of the extent to which UNSC-authorisation would even mitigate the threat posed to the *non-domination principle*, however. Indeed, given the perceived coloniality of the current international architecture (Bell, 2019, p. 3; Collste, 2015, p. 1; Rotmann et al., 2014, p. 371), it is unclear how much its approval would mean (see Section 4.2 for a more comprehensive discussion of this question). In this sense, ensuring legality could in

fact be considered normatively problematic. Regardless, it is true in many cases that the UNSC fails to grant authorisation not because a crisis is insufficiently severe, but rather because members of the P5 have a vested interest in preventing intervention. It is worth querying, then, whether the *non-domination* and *agency* principles might be met by seeking approval from other sources, if not outright authorisation.

One possible path to international approval is through the UN's so-called "uniting for peace" measures (UFP), which allows both the UNSC and the UNGA to make 'appropriate recommendations [...] to maintain or restore international peace and security' (UNGA, 1950). Though such recommendations lack the same legal authority as those mandated by the UNSC, it does at least provide the international community with 'a viable tool capable of overcoming the worst effects of a veto exercised in circumstances that cry out for an international response' (Carswell, 2013, p.453). It must be said, however, that the UFP has largely been used to condemn, provide aid, or establish consensual military support such as the implementation of peacekeepers (Scharf, 2023, p. 227); the UFP *has not* been used to call for non-consensual military intervention, even if humanitarian in nature. Even without UFP approval, its mere invocation might at least help to increase the legitimacy of an unauthorised UK intervention by establishing that the situation is dire enough to warrant action on a moral basis, regardless of its legal status.

The legitimising potential of the UFP is especially pertinent in situations where there is a substantial disconnect in views between members of the P5 and the UNGA. Indeed, one might go even further and argue, as Carswell does, that recommendations made by the UNGA through the UFP are arguably more representative than those made by the UNSC (2013, p. 455). The UNGA's approval was even acknowledged by the ICISS as a viable alternative to that of the UNSC

(2001, p. 53). The normative value of the UFP is given extra weight under the R-r2p. Whereas the UNSC has little descriptive or substantive representation from members of the Global South, the UNGA on the other hand has significant representation from post-colonial states. As such, even if interventions encouraged by the UFP might not entirely guarantee *non-domination*, tacit UNGA approval might be said to meet the *agency principle* at least on a multilateral basis. Outright approval for intervention is incredibly unlikely.

Violation of the *non-domination* and *agency* principles might be most easily mitigated in scenarios where the UK is able to rightfully claim that it is intervening on behalf of the legitimate government of the state in question. Myanmar, for example, is a state where much of the international community do not recognise the junta as the legitimate ruling authority, even if they remain in control of the levers of power. Indeed, the UN's special rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, emphasises that the junta lacks any form of constitutional or democratic legitimacy (UNHRC, 2023, p. 3). Likewise, the current representative of Myanmar to the UN is loyal to the civilian government rather than the junta. In this regard, the UK may be able to make the case that intervening on behalf of the legitimate government to prevent mass atrocities is not coercive but rather cooperative (as will be discussed in section 4.3). Given China's unreasonable use of the veto to block humanitarian action in Myanmar, support from the civilian opposition to the junta might be able to offer a UK intervention moral legitimacy, even if not necessarily legal authorisation. Intervening at the request of those perceived as legitimate helps, in this light, to limit the potential harm done to the *non-domination* and *agency* principles.

Should an intervention occur, the extent to which it meets the *sustainability principle* is likely to be contingent on how far it meets the requirements outlined

above. Even should an intervention be called for by a legitimate representative of the state in question and receive tacit support from the UNGA, there is still a risk that it will fail to meet this principle. Support from a “legitimate representative”, for instance, is unlikely to allay all suspicions that the UK is not merely exploiting the vulnerable position of a government-in-exile for its own neo-colonial purposes, even if such suspicions are completely unfounded. Furthermore, even with tacit support, the UK is a particularly unpalatable intervener given both its colonial history and its track record of questionably “humanitarian” interventions (such as in Iraq in 2003). As such, reputational damage might be more readily mitigated by the UK taking a backseat to other actors whose actions *are more likely* to be perceived as primarily humanitarian. On the other hand, any engagement with a legally illegitimate intervention might render the UK’s reparative endeavours suspect, and also call into question the humanitarian motivation of the state leading the intervention (Hjorthen and Duus-Otterström, 2016, p. 198).

To further increase its legitimacy as a rightful intervener (or supporter for intervention), however, the UK must express atonement for colonial injustice, and accept that the state is acting to protect populations that its own misconduct has made vulnerable. The explicitly reparative framing of this measure might do much to help the state meet the *non-domination* and *agency* principles, and thereby do less damage to the *sustainability principle*. It must also be willing to submit itself to some sort of oversight, and to commit itself to rebuilding the state in the aftermath of the intervention and to ensuring that local actors are empowered (as will be discussed in Section 5.3). In this sense, the UK might frame its humanitarian endeavours as using the increased military capacity gained from colonial injustice to make good the consequences of said injustice. Even so, such a course of action is unlikely to

convince much of the world of the righteousness of its actions; however, it at least has the potential to make this non-ideal solution to mass atrocity crimes less unpalatable. As such, this type of military action is still unlikely to meet the R-r2p's *sustainability principle*, even if steps might be taken to mitigate the harm it does.

While unauthorised humanitarian intervention meets the *reparative grounding* principle, then, it is unwise for the UK to prioritise this as the best means of making reparation. While the case of Myanmar illustrates that, with right intention and a substantial investment of resources, unauthorised humanitarian intervention might meet the *reparative effectiveness* principle, it is unlikely to meet the others. Centrally, in reproducing many of the superficial elements of so-called “humanitarian” interventions conducted during the colonial era, such a means of making reparation would fail to meet the *sustainability principle*. In other words, though this type of intervention may help to repair the situation in a specific context, it is likely to only work *once*. It would also likely set back immeasurably the prospects of the UK building relationships characterised by ‘equality, reciprocity, and respect’ (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5) with its former colonies and other Global South states. It is for these reasons that, although unauthorised intervention can never be ruled out as a possible measure under the R-r2p, it would be wiser for the UK to focus on alternative military means where possible. Having established this, though, it is necessary to query further to what extent legitimacy obtained through UNSC approval and widespread international support might help alleviate these issues, and what role the UK should play (if any) in a “coalition of the willing”.

4.2. UNSC-authorized Intervention

The likelihood of a UNSC-authorized military intervention is low, given the failures of NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya to halt atrocities (Teimouri and Subedi, 2018, pp. 30-1). Indeed, the perceived "mission creep" and linking of humanitarian protection with regime change (Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 9; Mahmud, 2026, p. 11) has rendered this type of intervention, under the R2P, to be labelled as irredeemable by its critics (Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 322). It is possible, however, that such an intervention may occur again one day. Rhetorically, at least, the R2P retains support among states at the UN (Evans, 2024, p. 330; Jarvis, 2025, p. 2). Since its supposed death after the intervention in Libya and the subsequent failures of the international community to respond to the crisis in Syria, the norm has been referred to with *increased* frequency in the UNSC (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 168; Rhoads and Welsh, 2019, p. 604; Scherzinger, 2023, p. 81). Although such support may be merely superficial, notably, the language of the R2P continues to be used in the highest echelons of the UNSC (GCR2P, 2026f). In particular relevance to this thesis, such resolutions have been made in reference to Sudan and South Sudan, whereas none have referenced this thesis' other case studies of Nigeria and Myanmar (GCR2P, 2026f). While such resolutions have often focused on the primary responsibility of the state to protect rather than any external powers, it is still significant that such statements have been made, given that 'raising the R2P flag [...] can be politically fraught' (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, p. 370). This political context thus makes Sudan (and, arguably, South Sudan) the most plausible setting for a UNSC-authorized intervention, even if operationalising any form of R2P intervention is both difficult and unlikely (Scherzinger, 2023, p. 81; Welsh, 2016b, p. 994).

Both Sudan and South Sudan have been labelled as current crises by the GCR2P, though the situation in Sudan is especially critical. Whereas South Sudan is on the cusp of a return to mass violence amid the state's precarious peace process (GCR2P, 2026c), Sudan is currently experiencing a full-blown civil war (GCR2P, 2026d). As such, while vulnerable populations in South Sudan might yet continue to benefit from less immediate means of protection, it seems that in Sudan (as in Myanmar), the time for prevention has passed and the moment for timely and decisive action has arrived. It is thus necessary to consider the potential reparative function of the UK taking part in an UNSC-backed intervention with particular regard to Sudan. Given the above discussion that even unauthorised humanitarian intervention can be assigned on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice, it can be taken as granted that this weaker, less legally and morally suspect form of intervention meets the *reparative grounding principle*. Likewise, this basis is strong given the role the consequences of British colonialism have played in increasing susceptibility to mass atrocities in Sudan (as explored in Chapter 2). As with the above discussion on unauthorised humanitarian intervention, it is worth querying instead whether UNSC-authorisation is more likely to meet the *other* guiding principles – first, turning to the principle of *reparative effectiveness*.

4.2.1. Coalitions: Increased Effectiveness

Sudan has been facing crises since the end of British rule, with colonialism engendering tensions not only between the north and (now independent) south but also enduring insecurity, particularly for non-Arab communities (GCR2P, 2026d) and those in Darfur (Mamdani, 2009, p. 169). Today, Sudanese populations are at risk

due to the ongoing civil war between the government's 'Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF)' (GCR2P, 2026d). Using this conflict as a backdrop, the GCR2P has identified 'deliberate targeting of civilians based on their ethnicity, which may amount to ethnic cleansing and genocide' (GCR2P, 2026d). As such, it follows that an end to the conflict, or at least obstructions to the military and protection of vulnerable populations, may help to reduce the frequency of mass atrocity crimes. Indeed, the GCR2P calls for a 'permanent cessation of hostilities' (2026d), though it follows that external military force might at least bring about an end to mass atrocities in the short-term (Seybolt, 2008, p. 276). With the employment of sufficient resources by a range of actors, the UK and other members of an external intervening coalition could achieve this end, given the overwhelming disparity in strength between any such coalition and either side of the Sudanese civil war. The added weight of the international community and the UNSC behind any hypothetical intervention would also likely increase its effectiveness. In this sense, this type of military action more readily meets the *reparative effectiveness principle* than that which is unauthorised, even if the specifically reparative *meaning* of the intervention might be diluted by the inclusion of other, non-culpable actors.

This principle is satisfied even further in that the combined resources of states through the UN is also likely to improve the effectiveness of rebuilding *after* intervention (see Section 5.3 for a more detailed discussion of the reparative potential of this measure). While it is possible that an intervention may be carried out largely or entirely unilaterally even if it is sanctioned multilaterally, the explicit invocation of an international responsibility through the UN is perhaps more likely to result in combined efforts than that which is unauthorised. This responsibility to

rebuild has been called for by R2P advocates (Bellamy, 2008, p. 638) and in the original ICISS report (2001, xi). By conducting any intervention through the United Nations, this also encourages greater oversight of the campaign (though the UN is still capable of providing insufficient oversight, as with the 2011 intervention in Libya), and thus perhaps reduces the likelihood that any interveners would simply leave vulnerable populations to fend for themselves once they perceive the immediate crisis to have been dealt with. In this regard, a UNSC-authorized intervention is perhaps more likely to avoid falling into the trap of short-termism. Likewise, the greater distribution of costs and duties means that UK participation in an internationally authorized intervention is more likely to meet the *sustainability principle*. While in this regard a UNSC-backed intervention is likely to serve a greater reparative function than any unauthorized intervention and is not so “non-ideal” as such a means of making reparation, it is still likely to face many of the same challenges that unauthorized intervention poses.

4.2.2. Echoes of Paternalism: Reproducing Coloniality

Indeed, even when the *reparative effectiveness principle* is met, interventions might still be understood as neo-colonial. The UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, for instance, has been largely hailed as one of the most successful humanitarian interventions (Dorman, 2009, p. 4; Gegout, 2018, p. 103; Langan, 2024, p. 193; Ucko, 2016, p.848) and was met with little opposition from the UN. But effectiveness alone does little to alleviate perceived coloniality. The UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, rather than purely humanitarian, might be labelled as a so-called ‘post-

imperial entanglement' (Shaw, 2011, p. 2434). Indeed, Kofi Annan (then UNSG) even seemed to present the UK's obligations in these terms when he argued that:

Britain, as the former colonial power, had the ultimate responsibility to intervene and rescue the situation and indicated that Britain's reliance solely on the international community to respond via the United Nations was no longer an option

(Dorman, 2009, p. 58)

In directly invoking the UK's position as Sierra Leone's former coloniser without stating that its responsibility stems from its injustice, even successful interventions can seem paternalistic. The fact that it was to this call that the UK finally answered seems to suggest that the UK was guided not by humanitarian values, but, as Langan argues, by the threat the crisis in Sierra Leone posed to its reputation (2024, p. 190). In this regard, such interventions might still fail to meet the *non-domination principle*. The argument Annan made also hints at another element to the paradox of intervention: it is the UK's prior colonial experience and familiarity with Sierra Leone that arguably made it a more effective intervener (Ucko, 2016, p. 874) at the same time as it made it less morally legitimate.

Even if we are to once more accept that the UK's intervention here was mostly humanitarian – even critics like Gegout accept that there was a humanitarian motive (2018, p. 33) – and that its intentions would be primarily humanitarian in future interventions, approval from the UNSC is likely to have less of an impact on allaying suspicions of neo-colonialism than one might expect. Indeed, given the above justification for the UK to intervene in Sierra Leone as the former colonial power, and that others on the council have argued that France should intervene in

the CAR on the same basis (Adams, 2021, p. 118), it might instead seem as if the UNSC is complicit in neo-colonialism and not a bulwark against it. In this sense, taking part in an intervention might still be perceived as furthering a global neo-colonial agenda while the balance of power on the UNSC remains as it is. While accusations of a neo-colonial agenda might be balanced out to some extent by involving states from the Global South in the intervening coalition, it seems more likely that this risks damaging the reputation of such states, rather than repairing that of the UK. As with unauthorised humanitarian intervention, then, engagement with these sorts of military means to protect vulnerable populations from mass atrocities might help those at risk in the specific case of Sudan even if it is unsustainable. There may, however, be additional pathways to mitigate these concerns.

In particular, one might consider whether the *non-domination* and *agency* principles can be more easily met by changing the UK's role in any future intervention. Fabre, for instance, draws a distinction between 'the duty to fund and provide material support for the war and the duty to deploy one's own forces' (2012, pp. 190-1). Fabre argues that the culpable state (in this case, the UK) must leave waging the intervention to the next best actor (2012, p. 191), but that the culpable state must take on 'the lion's share of [...] funding the war' (2012, pp. 190-1). In this sense, the UK might be able to fulfil its obligations without literal demonstrations of neo-colonial violence, thereby more readily meeting the *non-domination principle*. There are, however, good reasons to be sceptical of this. Though the UK can avoid putting a face to the violence, it might still be accused of neo-colonial goals in that it is still in many ways backing the intervention. One might even make the argument that it has outsourced the brunt of the labour necessary for the achievement of its neo-colonial goals without being willing to accept the risks that come with it (Hjorthen

and Duus-Otterström, 2016, p. 187). Even economic support for the intervention risks tainting its legitimacy also (Hjorthen and Duus-Otterström, 2016, p. 197).

This cannot be avoided by covert funding either, since this would arguably greatly weaken its reparative function (it would not be clear that the UK is trying to make amends), and if the source of the funding ever emerged, the reputational damage to the UK's attempts to make reparation would be severe. It is difficult to justify this intervention on the basis that a legitimate authority has requested humanitarian aid, as there is no clear parallel as there is in Myanmar. In Sudan, there is no comparable request for intervention from an authority widely recognised as legitimate; as such, the UK must be careful in *assuming* that victims will welcome intervention. Fabre, for instance, writes that one should be wary of 'presuming that the victims will welcome its forces' (2012, p. 176), and Cunliffe states that making such assumptions 'fosters the paternalism of strong states over weak states' (2010, p. 96). In many ways, such framing would still raise suspicions of neo-colonial overreach. In this light, even with UNSC approval, neither military intervention nor financial support for military intervention are likely to satisfy the *non-domination*, *agency*, and *sustainability* principles, even if they are more likely to meet the *reparative effectiveness principle*. As such, these measures are unlikely to be the best course of action for the UK under the R-r2p framework, even if they remain a possible last resort in highly non-ideal scenarios. Given this failure, however, it is worth now turning to the potential reparative function of *cooperative* military means.

4.3. Cooperative Military Measures

4.3.1. Deployment and Assistance with the State

Although much of the literature on military means to protect vulnerable populations from mass atrocities has focused on coercive interventions, it is entirely possible that military means may be used with permission from (and in conjunction with) the state. Rather than intervening on behalf of a vulnerable group, military assistance provided in a *cooperative* intervention would likely be much smaller in scale and would only be provided to states where the ruling authority is understood internationally as legitimate. As such, cooperative military duties are most relevant to states that wish to prevent mass atrocities from occurring in their territory, but simply lack the capacity to do so. This type of duty, more so than military means of atrocity prevention explored previously, is likely to have a greater reparative effect. It is thus worth exploring the place of cooperative military assistance in the R-r2p.

To illustrate the reparative potential of this type of military measure, particular attention will be paid here to the case of Nigeria, as the government is recognised as legitimate and most mass atrocity crimes are committed by paramilitaries, bandits, and insurgent groups such as Boko Haram (GCR2P, 2026b). It also makes sense that the UK can be assigned a responsibility to help Nigeria protect populations from the mass atrocities committed by Boko Haram, given that the actions of the insurgent group have been identified as a natural consequence of British colonial rule (Iyekekpolo, 2016, p. 2218; Maiangwa et al., 2018, p. 16), as demonstrated in Chapter 2. There are grounds to make this argument, with Ralph and Souter notably offering a similar line of reasoning to increase the UK's level of assistance to the Iraqi government in response to insurgency groups (2015, p. 711).

It is far from certain that acting in conjunction with the state is more likely to be reparative than the measures discussed above. On the one hand, the rise in atrocities committed by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram has been attributed to a weak and fragmented military approach (Bappah, 2016, p. 146; Iwuoha, 2019, p. 38). In particular, Iwuoha suggests that part of the reason for Nigeria's military failures to reckon with Boko Haram is the limited assistance and cooperation from allies such as the US (2019, p. 50). As such, it follows that greater military assistance could help the Nigerian state to meet *its* responsibility to protect its own populations. Greater buy-in from the state apparatus also means that this measure is more likely to satisfy the *reparative effectiveness principle*, assuming that the state itself has a greater knowledge of the crisis and is more likely to be trusted than a primarily external intervener. Working with the host state's consent rather than despite it also means that this measure is more likely to satisfy the *non-domination* and *agency* principles. In this regard, as well as because of the likely smaller economic and political costs of assistance, this measure is also more likely to be *sustainable*.

On the other hand, however, it is possible that working in conjunction with the state instead serves primarily (or perhaps exclusively) to support the authoritarian elites who are complicit in the causes and perpetration of mass atrocities. While cooperative military assistance *could* be more effective assuming that the state is trusted by its people, this is perhaps a big assumption to make. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, there is significant distrust of security forces which themselves have been accused of committing atrocities (GCR2P, 2026b; Langan, 2024, p. 203). Often, as explained in Chapter 2, such groups can trace their origins back to a colonial heritage. Providing resources to these groups knowing this context risks

making the UK complicit in their crimes. In this regard, the *non-domination* and *agency* principles might be met at least if the state is the primary unit owed reparation, but it means that reparation is not made to those vulnerable populations so often ignored historically. The *agency principle*, however, must be satisfied beyond the executive. Indeed, Dunford suggests that this is one of the main flaws of the R2P even as advocated *by* states in the Global South (2025, p. 622).

The deployment of troops under the UK's own command would help to mitigate this, though it would arguably still reproduce colonial modes of domination. There is also little guarantee that a state would willingly accept the deployment of troops *without* the resources necessary to provide protection on its own. Exploitation of British military assistance for non-humanitarian means becomes especially difficult to safeguard against, however, if the assistance comes in the form of providing training or resources to the security apparatus of the state aimed at making it more effective, as has been the case in Sri Lanka and Israel, for instance (Stavrianakis, 2023, p. 124). While a more effective security apparatus is good in theory, one must be wary of what its newfound effectiveness is used *in pursuit of*. One must be especially aware of the provision of arms as a measure of military assistance even if it instinctively seems to satisfy the *agency principle*.

4.3.2. Providing Arms

Although simply providing security forces in its former colonies with the resources and capacity to protect their own populations from mass atrocities may seem to be the most intuitively reparative option, this might not in fact be the case. This is especially important when it comes to providing state militaries with more

effective arms to combat groups which perpetrate mass atrocities. Indeed, the UK has been criticised by many authors for failing to consider (or, worse, ignoring) the potential misuse of the arms it sells (Gegout, 2018, p. 213; Langan, 2024, p. 193). The supplying of arms, even in the name of humanitarian assistance, also echoes the UK's long history of providing arms to its colonies both before and after independence in the name of protection (Stavrianakis, 2019, p. 60; Stavrianakis, 2023, p. 124). Indeed, Stavrianakis even goes as far as arguing that 'the misuse of UK-supplied weapons is a routine feature of wars' (2023, p. 124). In this light, rather than providing arms for free, the UK's reparative duties should instead entail desisting from supplying weaponry and arms-trading altogether if there is no reasonable assurance against their misuse. The provision of arms in this regard is likely to fail to meet the *reparative effectiveness principle*.

It is worth querying, however, whether there are any circumstances in which the benefits gained from supplying arms to groups, especially when it is to provide them with the ability to protect *themselves*. Although not strictly non-coercive since it bypasses the executive, such a measure arguably at least satisfies the *agency principle* even if not the *non-domination principle*. In Myanmar, for instance, one might argue that the UK should provide arms or at least training to opposition groups in order that they may protect themselves from the atrocities perpetrated by the Tatmadaw. This would have the benefit of seeming less direct than overt military deployments, and would also empower local groups to defend themselves. In this light, this measure is arguably more sustainable since it is far less costly (Pattison, 2018, p. 167). The *agency principle*, however, is only truly satisfied where groups can be identified as legitimate and locally accountable, both of which are difficult to ensure (Jacob and Staunton, 2022, p. 9; Pattison, 2018, p. 177). The flaws of this

measure are also apparent since there are limits to its *reparative effectiveness*. In particular, scholars have noted that it is likely to reduce security (Simon, 2012, p. 6) by entrenching conflicts (Mayersen, 2014, p. 502), and may even risk escalation (Jacob and Staunton, 2022, p. 9). As such, delivering arms to vulnerable populations for the purpose of self-defence might ‘increase the suffering of civilians in the long-term’ (Jacob and Staunton, 2022, p. 9).

Centrally, the flaws of arms provision as a means of reparation are due to the inability to know with absolute confidence that those who conduct armed resistance will not themselves perpetrate atrocities (Jacob and Staunton, 2022, p. 9; Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 379). One cannot guarantee that arms will only ever be used for defensive purposes; rather, it seems entirely possible that the provision of the capacity to fight back will instead result in a desire not for peace, but for revenge. Despite the fact that empowering vulnerable groups to defend themselves might in one sense have the *most* reparative potential since it returns agency to groups which have long lacked it, it is for these reasons prudent to refrain from doing so. Instead, given these consequences, it makes sense for the UK to foreswear delivering arms in favour of other modes of reparation, especially given that ‘ceasing to sell arms used to commit human rights violations’ would help to demonstrate ‘good international citizenship’ (Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1090). It would also help to demonstrate the UK’s commitment to making reparation on the basis that it is foregoing the benefits it continues to enjoy from colonialism – especially its ability to exploit international arms-trading controls for its own benefit (Stavrianakis, 2012, pp. 123-4). As with Dunford and Neu, this thesis holds that such steps are vital before military intervention can be justified (2019, p. 1090). Rather than waging (or

supporting) war, given the pitfalls of even its most cooperative form, the UK is better off finding alternative methods of protection.

4.4. Defensive Intervention: Safe Zones

Each of the above methods of immediate protection poses certain risks, whether they be humanitarian, ethical, or to the UK's reparative endeavours generally. All, for instance, run the risk of *increasing* the number of vulnerable people rather than *decreasing*. Humanitarian intervention, especially when performed without the consent of the host state, is not guaranteed to succeed. Kuperman even goes as far as arguing that humanitarian intervention has the potential to *intensify* ongoing mass atrocities, since the promise of protection leads vulnerable groups to act in a way that invites persecution with the expectation of intervention (2008a, p. 219; 2008b, p. 49). While Kuperman's argument is morally problematic in that it implies violence against persecuted groups is almost entirely contingent on *their* conduct and provides little answer as to what should be done *instead*, Kathman and Wood found in their statistical analysis of foreign intervention that it can result in a surge in genocidal activity (2011, p. 740). Likewise, both coercive and cooperative interventions run the risk of displacing populations further (Gibney, 2018, p. 1). As such, there are further reasons to consider alternative means. The reparative potential for each of these is thus limited, in the sense that they are far from guaranteed to "protect" vulnerable populations, in some ways reproduce the injustices of colonialism, and threaten the UK's reparative project. The limited ability of these measures to satisfy each of the R-r2p's guiding principles means that the

UK should desist from acting upon such measures of atrocity prevention other than as a non-ideal last resort.

It must be said that, even regardless of the reparative context, humanitarian intervention was never intended to be anything other than an option of last resort even under the standard R2P framework (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, p. 368). Indeed, this attitude to intervention has been further emphasised in alternatives to the R2P such as China's "Responsible Protection" (Garwood-Gowers, 2016, pp. 106-7) and Brazil's "Responsibility While Protecting" (Adams, 2021, p. 33; Ribeiro et al., 2021, p. 215; Tourinho et al., 2016, p. 138). Others have suggested either separating out coercive measures into a separate *fourth* pillar (Peak, 2025, p. 4) or excising the use of coercive force entirely (Dunford and Neu, 2019, pp. 1086-7; Graubart, 2015, p. 69). This thesis, while sympathetic to such arguments, does not go so far as to argue that these measures should be completely removed from consideration under the R-r2p framework.

More importantly, this thesis *does not* make the argument that militaries cannot be used in a way that is reparative. Indeed, while there may be a moral imperative to pacifism, this in many cases is likely to be outweighed by the comparatively greater responsibility to protect. Likewise, while asylum (in its current form) may offer a peaceful means of protection, it is far from a perfect alternative as many vulnerable people are unable to flee from mass atrocities and therefore incapable of claiming asylum (possible ways to mitigate this will be considered in Section 4.5). As such, answers must be found as to how to protect populations *in situ*, and this, by its nature, is likely to necessitate the employment of some degree of force. It might thus be helpful to draw a further distinction between offensive and defensive force. The former group incorporates all of the above measures and

entails the waging (or supporting) of conflict against the perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes. Defensive force, as the name suggests, does not *entail* conflict – at least, not at the command of those protecting vulnerable populations. First and foremost, defensive force necessitates the use of military measures to defend vulnerable groups from those who wish to perpetrate mass atrocities against them. As such, it may involve at least limited, reactive engagements. This type of atrocity prevention does not therefore preclude conflict, since it may be necessary in order to delay, deter, or even defeat would-be perpetrators, but it is not its primary means.

One way in which this type of protection might be best carried out is through the establishment and enforcement of safe zones. Safe zones (Long, 2013, p. 472) or “safe areas” (Birnie and Welsh, 2018, p. 348; Jacob, 2018, p. 315) have a long history as an answer to how to protect non-combatants during conflicts. In particular, the use of such measures has become increasingly common since the end of the Cold War even if its history dates back to the early 20th century (Long, 2013, pp. 459-61). In avoiding the use of offensive force, safe zones have the potential to more readily meet the *non-domination* and *sustainability* principles. A clear demonstration of humanitarian intent through the foreswearing of offensive force might help to ensure that the UK is perceived as acting in a primarily reparative manner. In satisfying these principles, however, it might be that the *reparative effectiveness principle* is not met. As Long notes, for instance, safe zones have not always succeeded in the past, as demonstrated by massacres in such spaces in Srebrenica in the 1990s (2013, p. 459). Safe zones must offer legitimate protection, rather than merely concentrating vulnerable populations in a way that inadvertently eases the task of their oppressors (Long, 2013, pp. 461-2). Because of the lack of consistency

as to how to run safe zones, Gilbert and Rüschi call them the ‘least worst alternative’ (2017, p. 1).

Indeed, safe zones are arguably only another non-ideal solution. Despite their flaws, it is sometimes the only way to protect those who cannot leave (Gilbert and Rüschi, 2017, p. 1), including internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are particularly vulnerable (Birnie and Welsh, 2018, p. 348). Despite the failure of some safe zones, they offer at least a greater degree of protection to vulnerable groups than abstention from doing so would. The need to help IDPs is significant in each of this thesis’ case studies, especially Sudan, with almost 9 million displaced people in the state (UNHCR, 2026a). Safe zones in Sudan might help to provide at least some stability for many of these people, if not complete protection. Where offensive military intervention (especially unauthorised) has the potential to further displace already vulnerable populations, as well as to provoke acts of retaliatory violence, safe zones do the opposite – they provide a space for the displaced to seek sanctuary. In this regard, it follows that any offensive military intervention the UK conducts should *also* necessitate the concurrent establishment of safe areas, to accommodate those displaced by its military pursuits. Safe zones thus somewhat satisfy the *reparative effectiveness principle*, even if only in a very rudimentary manner.

The difficulty in establishing safe zones, however, must also not be underestimated. While safe zones might be created in cooperation with the state such as in Nigeria, the cases in which they are particularly necessary are those where it is most difficult to establish them. For instance, the regime in Myanmar is unlikely to allow any external interference, and establishing a cooperative agreement with any of the belligerent forces in Sudan seems unlikely. In other words, the establishment of safe zones might still require some violation of the *non-domination*

principle, since the coercive use of force (even if defensive) is likely to be necessary. Such a show of force might be perceived as a reproduction of colonial modes of domination, as a form of paternalistic protection reminiscent of the colonial era. The image of UK troops taking control of territory and enforcing their own rules is no less likely to rankle those who safeguard sovereignty above all else than is offensive military intervention.

That being said, the establishment of safe zones is likely to be received better than other types of military intervention, and thereby satisfy the *non-domination principle* to a greater extent *comparatively*. This arguably makes the establishment of safe zones as a measure under the R-r2p at least more *sustainable*. *Non-domination* might be further satisfied by abstaining from force *itself*, instead providing the necessary resources (financially or otherwise) to those who can establish safe zones with less controversy. In the case of Sudan, for instance, this might mean working through respected regional peace and security institutions. Efforts should be made to emphasise the primarily reparative and humanitarian rationale for safe zones in order to ensure that they can remain as a more desirable (but still non-ideal) alternative to military intervention (Birnie and Welsh, 2018, p. 348).

Even if one were to account for these limitations of the measure, safe zones are not free of controversy. For instance, some authors have suggested that states have shown a preference for the creation of safe zones in order to justify abstaining from granting a fair share of asylum (Birnie and Welsh, 2018, p. 360; Long, 2013, p. 472). Indeed, though Birnie and Welsh suggest that safe zones are ‘more proactive than the largely reactive asylum regime’ (2018, p. 349), states must then ‘provide those seeking refuge [...] with the option to seek asylum elsewhere’ (Jacob, 2018, p. 326). This highlights the need for any protective framework, as well as any reparative

project, to be multifaceted. As such, safe zones should be understood as a temporary solution, not a viable substitute for enduring protection. Therefore, while safe zones and offensive military intervention may in some cases be the most appropriate but least ideal solution to the risks posed to vulnerable groups, they must be combined with other appropriate measures of refugee protection. The UK should thus prioritise the establishment of humanitarian “corridors” (Gilbert and Rüsç, 2017, p. 1) which are likely to reduce the threat posed to vulnerable populations by ensuring that such groups do not have to remain in safe zones for too long before they can seek refuge in a place of greater safety. In this light, we must also consider how forms of protection *external* to the state in which mass atrocities are taking place can function as a type of reparation for colonial injustice.

4.5. Protecting Refugees: Asylum, Aid, and Resettlement

Refugees are often said to be some of the most vulnerable populations in the world (Birnie and Welsh, 2018, p. 340; Howe, 2022, p. 53; IRC, 2023, p. 4). Despite this, there has been a tendency to see atrocity prevention norms such as the R2P as somewhat separate from asylum mechanisms. The treatment of refugees is hardly mentioned in the original 2001 ICISS report except for a brief reference (2001, p. 40), and receives no explicit mention in the 2005 WSOD. According to Bellamy and Dunne, there has long been a ‘tendency to see R2P as disconnected from associated programmes of work’ (2016, p. 14). The protection of refugees has been mentioned in some of the UNSG’s yearly reports on the R2P (Aldoghmi, 2019, p. 115), though never in very much detail. Others have suggested that this distinction might be intentional, given that calling for greater protection of refugees as a

responsibility under the R2P is likely to increase its costs (Gilgan, 2017, pp. 389-90).¹⁵ It is also worth pointing out the potential for contagion here: the R2P's relative toxicity might damage the established political validity of asylum (Newman, 2017, p. 62), while states' reluctance to offer asylum might also make them more sceptical of the R2P. It would be unfair, however, to claim that academics and practitioners *agree* with this arbitrary separation as anything other than artificial (Souter, 2016, p. 805). Others have in fact argued that asylum (and the protection of refugees) *can* fall under the second and third pillars of the R2P as an immediate means of protection (Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 359).

The lack of an explicit link between the R2P and asylum provides yet another reason to opt for a specific framing of the UK's responsibility to protect in lowercase. Choosing to avoid the former in favour of the "R-r2p" helps to alleviate the risk of contagion for those wedded to the norm while also acknowledging the broader range of tools available to the UK in making reparation. In other words, while asylum and other methods of refugee protection *can* fall under the remit of the R2P, it might be more *helpful* to conceive of them simply as tools through which to protect vulnerable populations rather than risk jeopardising protection efforts through dogmatic adherence to the R2P norm.

4.5.1. Asylum: Grounding, Effectiveness, and Limitations

The granting of asylum is an especially powerful tool under the R-r2p, as it is both obviously effective and far less controversial internationally than other methods

¹⁵ While the protection of refugees exists as a broader responsibility of the UK, this section focuses specifically on the protection of refugees at risk of mass atrocities under the R-r2p.

of immediate human protection (Gilgan, 2017, p. 377; Glanville, 2021, p. 86; Mayersen, 2014, p. 500; Ralph, 2018, p. 196; Souter, 2015, p. 31; Souter, 2016, p. 805). In particular, Bellamy highlights the protection of refugees as a necessary measure since it eases the flight of vulnerable people away from harm (2015a, pp. 44-5). Compared to the perceived militaristic biases of R2P advocates, asylum has been traditionally thought of as a 'primary means to provide [... immediate] protection' (Jacob, 2018, p. 312). As Barbour and Gorlick note, 'the historical record supports' the strengths of asylum outlined above, given the consequences of failing to provide adequate asylum in contexts such as the Holocaust (2008, p. 23). As such, measures which aim to provide protection for refugees such as asylum are likely to satisfy the *reparative effectiveness principle*.

There are many good reasons, then, to support the inclusion of a more robust and generous attitude to asylum and the protection of refugees under the UK's R-r2p on the basis of *reparative effectiveness*. Such measures also easily meet the *reparative grounding principle*. It might seem intuitive to assign such duties to the UK since the comparatively more costly duty of military intervention can also be assigned. At the same time, one might query whether the duty is *more demanding* here since it entails meeting a responsibility domestically rather than externally. It is this very fact that makes this measure *more* reparative, however. As stated previously, the redistribution of power and resources gained from exploitation (or, at least, the use of them to make compensation) is central to the whole reparative endeavour. Several political theorists have argued that former colonial powers have a responsibility to commit to more generous immigration policies towards their former colonies, both on the basis of association (Tan, 2007, p. 302) and reparation (Achieme, 2019, p. 1510; Amighetti and Nuti, 2016, pp. 551-2; Goldstone, 2024, p.

763). Indeed, it might be fair to claim that, if the descendants of those whose suffering built the metropole wish to immigrate there, then that is their right. This is given additional weight in the context of humanitarian protection. Accordingly, asylum and its associated measures can be assigned on the basis of reparation for colonial injustice.

While asylum satisfies the *reparative effectiveness principle* to some extent (as explored above), there are also some potential pitfalls to the measure. Although asylum does repair the immediate precarity of *some* potential victims by changing their context, it does little to repair the specific mass atrocity scenario *within* the state/territory itself (unless one was to grant asylum to every single member of a vulnerable group). In this sense, even those who are not immediately vulnerable to mass atrocities might still suffer their harms since their protection cannot be guaranteed. It also faces several challenges depending on the nature of the UK's asylum policy. Those most able to flee mass atrocity contexts and travel as far as the UK to claim asylum are unlikely to be the most vulnerable – it makes sense that those able to do so are likely to be young, physically-abled, single men (Souter, 2022, p. 115). Such demographics are by no means undeserving of asylum, but this does mean that there are many who are *unable* to be protected by asylum in its current form.

Likewise, those who are able to flee might have contacts in the UK, and are more likely to be educated (Aksoy and Poutvaara, 2019, p. 27) and from comparatively affluent backgrounds (Souter, 2022, p. 115). Accordingly, the current system of asylum risks leading to so-called “brain drain” (Sager, 2014, p. 560), engendering lasting social and economic inequalities. It is hard to consider this impact in much depth, however, when refugee protection essentially amounts to

triage – the goal is to protect the vulnerable *now*, rather than ensure the good of the state committing said crimes. Further to this, in that the perpetration of mass atrocity crimes represent the breakdown of the state’s moral fabric, one might make the argument that populations and ethnic groups which are victim to injustices have no obligation to the state nor those who are complicit in their victimisation, even if they do have a responsibility to other vulnerable groups. Those who perpetrate and those who permit have failed to uphold their half of the social contract, and those groups targeted by mass atrocity crimes therefore need not either. Regardless, this highlights the need to ensure equitable access to asylum.

4.5.2. Protection of Refugees: Domestic or Proximal?

In order to counter these limitations, the UK must create more comprehensive pathways for the vulnerable to flee from mass atrocity contexts and facilitate these by working with regional partners proximal to the crimes. Beyond this, the UK must not only signal its support for asylum, but also facilitate the long-term resettlement of asylum seekers within its own borders. Doing so would help the UK make proper reparation by signalling to populations in its former colonies that they have a *right* to stay in the UK permanently. One must also be conscious of the potential repercussions of a generous asylum policy, and ensure that, as with the previously discussed measures, the cost borne by the British public is not too great to result in significant backlash. Pro-asylum policies across Europe in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, for instance, have been linked to the rise of explicitly anti-refugee far right parties (Secen, 2022, p. 325). The political costs must be carefully measured even in the context of reparation, so as to ensure that this measure satisfies the

sustainability principle. As explained in Section 3.4, policy-makers in the UK also have a ‘dynamic duty’ to overcome soft constraints like these (Gilabert, 2017, p. 122). This might also entail effectively framing a generous asylum policy in a manner which invokes the UK’s responsibility. Polls also suggest that the British public would more readily suggest comprehensive efforts to help refugees *integrate* (IRC, 2023, p. 2).

Lastly, the various methods of refugee protection available to the UK could meet the *non-domination principle* and thereby help to demonstrate the UK’s atonement and desire to be a so-called “good international citizen” (Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1090; Souter, 2016, p. 797; Souter, 2022, p. 25). Indeed, as Newman writes, it is a ‘reasonable test of their humanitarian credentials more broadly’ (2017, p. 62). Currently, there is a perception that some Western states believe themselves far enough removed from mass atrocities *spatially* that they can treat mass atrocity prevention merely as a foreign policy issue (Gilgan, 2017, p. 367; Newman, 2017, p. 60; Welsh, 2014, p. 3). Such an attitude might be perceived among states in the Global South as a kind of hubris reminiscent of colonial-era notions of “civilisation”, and also seems to suggest that states like the UK have an aversion to accepting the same types of responsibilities as states which *do* accept asylum seekers.

Successive UK governments have routinely provided inadequate resources to support its endeavours in domestic refugee protection (Savur and Owen, 2024, p. 5), giving the impression that it lacks the capacity to do more than it is. While more authoritarian and isolationist members of the UK’s body politic might wish to support appeal to a lack of capacity, it is more likely, rather, that there is a lack of sufficient *will* among the political elite (Souter, 2022, pp. 140-1). Indeed, the UK definitely meets “minimal capacity” even if not “optimal capacity” (Souter, 2022, p. 148), and it

does this far more considerably than states which are host to the majority of refugees.

In this sense, demonstrating a willingness to protect a larger portion of the world's refugees than it currently does might serve to repair the UK's legitimacy and international standing (especially among the Global South). Such a move is given heightened reparative significance given that, as many have noted, the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers have long been located in (often post-colonial) Global South states (Aldoghmi, 2019, p. 115; Bellamy, 2015, p. 69; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 64; IRC, 2023, p. 2), often in 'states that are themselves vulnerable to conflict' (Adams, 2021, p. 122). While it might simply be that this is because such states are often closest to crises (and thus the most easily accessible to those fleeing mass violence), it can also be understood as another consequence of colonialism since the harms committed destabilised not only specific states but whole regions. This legacy is clear in the experience of each of the chosen case studies of this thesis. It is especially true of Myanmar, where 74% of those who have fled the state have sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2026b). Likewise, 64% of those who have fled Nigeria have sought refuge in bordering Niger, and 31% in Cameroon (UNHCR, 2026c). In this case, the UK has a responsibility not only to grant asylum within its own borders, but to assist neighbouring states in meeting their own responsibilities. Bangladesh, for instance, is host to 920,000 Rohingya in the 'world's largest refugee camp' of Cox's Bazar (Danish Refugee Council, 2025). The Rohingya have little prospect of returning home under the current regime (Danish Refugee Council, 2025), and so solutions must be found to help members of the group begin to rebuild their lives – this is what reparation entails.

Expecting any one state to single-handedly facilitate this is unfair on an ethical basis, but is doubly unfair when the host state is also a former British colony and thus, to some extent, owed reparation. This experience is not specific to Bangladesh, but occurs across former British colonies. Uganda, for instance, is host to 2.2 million refugees from neighbouring states such as Sudan and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2026d). In that the mass atrocity crimes which have led these populations to seek refuge can be linked to the legacies of British colonialism, one might make the argument here that it is again former British colonies (themselves still reckoning with the legacies) who are paying the price for their own exploitation. Allowing this to continue would imply that the UK has no real desire to make atonement or reparation, and that it is content to continue to see the protection of vulnerable people as purely a foreign policy issue (Gilgan, 2017, p. 367).

While it is wise to be critical of any attempts to *exclusively* pursue refugee protection by proxy via foreign aid, it is an additional way that the UK must make reparation. In order to avoid the implication that the UK can shirk its responsibilities domestically, however, this must be matched with a robust asylum policy. Ultimately, it is not its own standing which the UK should prioritise, but the protection of vulnerable populations to whom the state owes reparation. Indeed, while the need for many Western states like the UK to improve and increase their efforts to protect refugees domestically has understandably often been the focus of debate, such an emphasis overlooks the fact that this might not necessarily be what displaced peoples *want*. Rather, there are many refugees who might wish to seek protection elsewhere, thus highlighting the need to consider the importance of the *agency principle*.

The notion that refugees and asylum seekers should be able to choose how they are protected has, as Gibney notes, become mired in controversy (2018, p. 5). Indeed, one might argue that so long as an asylum seeker is granted protection *somewhere*, then the humanitarian obligation has been met and nothing more must be done. As explored above, there are powerful ethical reasons why this should not be the case. First, it is reasonable to expect that asylum seekers should *feel* safe, not only be told that they are safe by external powers. Further to this, they should also be able to have a reasonable chance at rebuilding the lives that are no longer available to them in their home countries (Gibney, 2018, p. 5; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 77; Souter, 2022, pp. 123-6). There may be many factors at play in determining whether a refugee would feel themselves able to rebuild their lives, including, perhaps controversially for some commentators, economic incentives (Aksoy and Poutvaara, 2019, p. 5). They might also be drawn to settle in countries with 'ethnic compatriots' (Hatton, 2020, p. 85).

Based on these factors, it makes sense that asylum seekers are often likely to seek refuge either in states which are geographically proximal to the state they are fleeing (Gibney, 2018, pp. 5-6; Hatton, 2020, p. 85) or states with which their diaspora have a historical connection. This might come in the form of 'colonial ties, common language, and shared culture' (Hatton, 2020, p. 85). On this basis, the UK ought to adopt a generous policy of resettlement when it is the desire of those fleeing conflicts. Resettlement, as defined by the UNHCR, entails the 'transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence' (UNHCR, 2026e). Adopting this measure under the R-r2p might mean not only supporting asylum seekers in the process, but also providing financial incentives to the state in which they are seeking

resettlement. A generous approach to resettlement should be adopted if it is the desire of those fleeing conflict; such an approach has the added benefit of being more politically stable (Hashimoto, 2018, p. 174).

4.5.3. Ensuring Agency: Two Paths to Protection

There is justification for both asylum by proxy, then, as well as asylum in the UK (Ruhs and Van Hear, 2014, p. 4), on the basis that those seeking asylum are likely to be ‘best informed about what the essential criteria for flourishing are in their own case’ (Gibney, 2018, pp. 5-6). Trusting the perspectives of refugees may make both ethical and pragmatic sense (an asylum framework which is likely to be more effective is less likely to come with the ‘geopolitical shocks’ often associated with displacement), but it is also given extra significance in a reparative framework. Indeed, as Hoesch and Mantel emphasise, if a state is responsible in some way for a refugee’s displacement, then it has an obligation to accommodate the refugee’s concerns in a way that harms them as little as possible (2024, p. 657). This might mean granting asylum to vulnerable populations at home in the UK, or it might mean aiding regional partners to protect them in areas proximal to the mass atrocities they are fleeing from, or otherwise providing ‘compensation to the refugee’s chosen state of asylum’ (Souter, 2022, p. 125).

The reparative potential of *listening* to the wishes and desires of refugees is high, largely because it entails directly inquiring as to what it would take to repair a refugee’s harm – this is the premise of the *agency principle*. While there are of course limits to this, and it might be difficult to operationalise on a large scale, there are strong ethical rationales for at least trying to implement a policy which is

responsive to refugee choice. Doing so would also help to rectify the imbalance in power between colonised and coloniser, another historical-structural harm. In other words, by transferring some power to refugees from former British colonies, the UK is acknowledging its willingness in the past to ignore and betray the wishes of populations it oppressed. It also helps to repair the injustices suffered by refugees by offering them some agency, something that they for the most part lack (Jones and Teytelboym, 2017, p. 171; Mayersen, 2014, p. 500). In this light, though none of the tools discussed in this chapter can alone be the whole of the UK's attempts to make reparation, a robust and responsive approach to refugee protection is likely to be the least dominating, and most reliably effective and sustainable tool, and thus has the highest reparative potential.

4.6. Conclusion: Operationalising Immediate Protection

The most pressing matter of atrocity prevention remains how best to protect those who are immediately at risk, especially in light of the potential political, economic, and moral costs. This matter, as this chapter has demonstrated, is arguably complicated further by the reparative demand generated by colonial injustice. While more must be done to offer protection to those whom the UK's past conduct has made vulnerable, the measures which might achieve this protection must be carefully weighed against the guiding principles of the R-r2p. In applying this evaluative framework, it is possible to identify a hierarchy of measures which have the strongest reparative potential, largely moving from least coercive (as the most preferable) to most coercive (as the least preferable). The position of measures on

this hierarchy can thus be understood as the inverse of the sequencing of this chapter.

Above all other measures considered in this chapter, asylum and other methods of refugee protection are likely to best satisfy the demands of the R-r2p. In particular, a robust and multifaceted approach to the protection of refugees (in the UK and abroad) is likely to maximise immediate effectiveness while minimising the reproduction of colonial modes of domination. It provides a valid, if not perfect, path to providing compensation to those harmed by colonial injustice without needlessly generating new, excessive harms. Following this, methods of “defensive force” provide a route through which the UK might provide protection *in situ* to those who are unable to flee atrocity scenarios; they are consequently *comparatively* preferable to other methods of military intervention. Indeed, while there are some merits to cooperative military assistance if strict controls are put in place to ensure both agency and legitimacy, even this measure risks contradicting the *sustainability principle*. Coercive interventions, whether authorised or unauthorised, should never be ruled out but should always be understood as only ever a non-ideal means of absolute last resort. Largely, these measures should generally be forsworn and, where appropriate, perhaps even publicly opposed (see Chapter 6). The UK would in fact be best advocating against unauthorised humanitarian intervention, as well as maintaining a distance even from those coercive military interventions which do receive UNSC approval.

There are several operational implications for immediate means of protection from mass atrocity crimes that have arisen over the course of this chapter. Importantly, whether through military intervention or through the provision of arms, it is clear that it would be best for the UK to desist from measures which either

excessively generate new harms or lack sustainability. In ensuring this, it would also be wise for the UK to emphasise the empowerment of those in need of assistance. This is the main strength of a more robust approach to the protection of refugees, where agency can be considered on a more granular level, compared to the difficulty in ascertaining whether intervention is truly what a group *wants*. It is also clear that there is a need for the R-r2p to be multifaceted; any forceful measure must be paired with a commitment to protecting those displaced by it, just as these latter measures must also assist those who remain in rebuilding their lives once atrocities cease. This is perhaps the central flaw of any immediate means of protection, though *especially* military intervention: there is almost always a failure to address the root causes of the crisis (Seybolt, 2008, pp. 276-7). It is to these measures that this thesis now turns, as a possible route through which the UK might rebuild trust and restore strong relationships built on mutual respect (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5), through a genuine expression of a desire to *help*, first and foremost, economically. This might come not only as humanitarian aid, but also in the form of capacity-building and (more indirectly) development assistance.

5. The Potential of Prevention: Aid and (Re)Building Resilience

The protection of vulnerable groups from mass atrocities is best pursued not solely by immediate measures, even if they remain a dire necessity; the limitations of such measures are clear in the preceding chapter. Instead, it would be best to focus on preventive measures further upstream. Such a focus is ideal in that it has the potential to save lives by never allowing them to be put at risk. It also serves a key political purpose in that, according to Gareth Evans (one of the ICISS' co-chairs), 'the credibility of the whole [...] enterprise has depended from the outset on giving central importance to prevention' (2016b, p. 923). While Evans' argument may be made in the context of the R2P, it seems likely that with any process of protection, by exhibiting a commitment to the potentially expensive process of prevention, states are more likely to recognise efforts to end mass atrocities as well-intentioned. This is given additional weight in line with the task of moral repair, as outlined in Section 3.3 (von Platz and Reidy, 2006, p. 361; Wenar, 2006, p. 405; Walker, 2006a, p. 213). The R-r2p goes beyond the 2005 WSOD, then, which does not single out any responsibility as greater than the others (UNGA, 2005a, p. 30), and advocates for a *shift* towards prevention as the primary means to make protection in a reparative framework.

This shift is in accordance with the growing focus on prevention in theory, if not entirely in practice. Several scholars, for instance, have advocated for an increased focus on prevention in regard to the R2P (Bellamy, 2014, p. 201; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 98; Graubart, 2015, p. 202; Hindawi, 2022, p. 52; Reike, 2016, p. 582), given the perceived unlikelihood and ineffectiveness of reaction. This call

has been matched with explicit statements on the primacy of prevention in reports on the R2P within the UN (UNGA, 2013, p. 15; UNGA, 2015, p. 2; UNGA, 2016, p. 11; UNGA, 2017, p. 2; UNGA, 2019, p. 3), while others have at least explored the scope of prevention (UNGA, 2014, p. 1; UNGA, 2018, p. 4; UNGA, 2021, pp. 5-6; UNGA, 2024, p. 3; UNGA, 2025, pp. 2-3). Given the toxicity of coercive means ‘in a post-Libya environment’ (Hofmann and Suthanthiraraj, 2019, p. 240), one might characterise this “shift” as pragmatic (Gilgan, 2017, p. 68; Moses, 2019, p. 239). A prioritisation of prevention under the R-r2p is not only pragmatic, however, but is also more likely to succeed in alleviating the enduring *structural* legacies of colonialism than immediate means. A “shift” to prevention, however, is not quite so simple an answer as its most zealous proponents might have us believe.

As with military intervention, there remains a reluctance among international actors to bear the costs of prevention (Levinger, 2024, p. 203; UNGA, 2014, p. 18; UNGA, 2015, p. 10). This may be because, as Bellamy notes, while ‘preventing atrocities is cheaper than responding and rebuilding societies afterwards [...] the costs of implementing this agenda on a global scale could be substantial’ (2022, p. 24). The perceived return on investment for prevention is also lower than that of reaction, given that one cannot definitively prove that preventive measures have prevented mass atrocities in the same way one can prove that they have stopped ongoing mass atrocities; proving efficacy of preventive measures requires thinking in counterfactuals. Such ambiguity might lead to some reluctance in prioritising preventive measures over others. This might be termed the “efficacy problem” and has particular relevance to the *reparative effectiveness principle*.

There have also been various debates as to what duties are demanded by the responsibility to prevent (Peak, 2025, p. 8). Gallagher broadly divides the debate into

‘three camps: minimalist, middle ground, and radical’ (2022, p. 1020). At the heart of this, we might also query exactly what we mean by *prevention*. While we might understand prevention *literally* to mean that which stops something from ever happening, this does not mean that prevention ceases to be important once an atrocity has occurred; indeed, it would be foolish to treat crises as having a clear temporal boundary in this sense. For instance, one mass killing, while an abhorrent injustice, may not result in a crisis equal to ongoing genocide. In other words, prevention might still be relevant after the perpetration of a mass atrocity crime in order to prevent *further* mass atrocity crimes. Prevention has, for the most part, however, become synonymous with the R2P’s pillar II to mean *non-coercive* actions which are often financial in nature, though this definition is by no means uniform. This uncertainty as to what measures should be fulfilled in order to prevent further mass atrocity crimes can be termed the “scope problem”. In considering the “scope problem”, particular attention must also be paid to the *reparative grounding* and *sustainability* principles.

What many proponents of prevention may be happy to overlook, however, is that non-coercive measures are not entirely uncontroversial (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, pp. 105-6). Indeed, Bellamy goes as far as to say that:

The general unwillingness of States to recognise atrocity risks at home and cooperate with international actors constitutes a significant barrier to effective early prevention [...] This, of course, can make prevention just as politically sensitive and highly contentious as armed intervention

(2022, pp. 24-5)

This is perhaps unsurprising, as states are unlikely to tolerate invasions of their “privacy” much more than literal invasions of their territory. In fact, former Special Advisor to the UNSG on R2P, Jennifer Welsh, comments as much: ‘An additional political barrier is the unwillingness of states under stress, or their close allies, to subject their ‘situation’ to international discussion or engagement’ (2016a, p. 225). Consider, for instance, how any form of assistance might raise the visibility of crises which the receiving state is experiencing, given that the providing actor is likely to publicise their work. Even if the actor refrained from publicising their work, the acknowledgement that the receiving state or group needs *help* managing their own crises is also potentially thorny. In both instances, the receiving state, group, or its representatives, lose face and potentially authority. For this reason, Glanville and Pattison note that it can often be hard to acquire the consent necessary for prevention (2024, p. 106). We might term this the “palatability problem”. This problem must be considered alongside the principles of *non-domination*, *agency*, and *sustainability*.

To summarise, prevention faces three central problems of efficacy, scope, and palatability. Each of these problems must be considered when assessing the scope and scale of prevention within the reparative approach put forth by this thesis, in addition to the guiding principles outlined prior (see Section 3.5). This chapter will begin by addressing the scope problem by engaging with Gallagher’s spectrum of prevention (2022, p. 1020). In doing so, this chapter will consider how the extra weight of reparative obligations increases the scope of prevention demanded of the debtor state, affirming that the UK must do more than just provide immediate, short-term aid. Accordingly, this chapter largely focuses on measures short of wholesale reform of global structures, where the primary intention is to prevent mass atrocities.

Following this, the chapter then considers four different elements of prevention moving progressively upstream, from most reactive to least. As such, the chapter turns first to the most immediate form of non-violent preventive assistance in the form of humanitarian aid, concluding that such a measure functions as an appropriate form of reparation and is best prioritising “doing good” to those made vulnerable by injustice rather than strictly adhering to neutrality. Humanitarian assistance, however, is unlikely to achieve the long-term goals of prevention on its own, necessitating an exploration of the reparative function of development more broadly. The chapter then turns to assessing the responsibility to rebuild as an essential means of prevention through development.¹⁶ The moral justification of the responsibility to rebuild is clear and provides an alternative route through which the UK can assist populations while abstaining from taking part in military interventions; however, in order to be reparative, the importance of local agency is once again emphasised.

Following these two sections, the thesis then turns to measures which are further upstream. While rebuilding might be best understood as *a form of* development, its goals should be understood as more immediate, focused, and prevention-driven than what is typically understood as development assistance. In adopting an approach to prevention which lies somewhere between the “middle ground” and “radical” camps (as outlined in Section 5.1), however, this chapter also considers the role of broader development assistance whose goal is not solely to prevent atrocities. This section makes the argument that development aid which is motivated by reparation and ensures agency can both prevent atrocities and restore

¹⁶ The absence of the responsibility to rebuild from the 2005 agreement despite its presence in the 2001 report (ICISS, 2001, p. 39) and popularity has been criticised (Bellamy, 2008, p. 638; Ercan, 2022, p. 299; Evans, 2016b, pp. 923-4)

justice. The last aspect considered in this chapter is whether efforts to democratise deserve a place in a reparative approach to mass atrocity prevention. Ultimately, this chapter makes the case that democracy *can* serve a reparative function if it supports indigenous democratic institutions (formal or otherwise) and avoids partisan support.

5.1. Perspectives on Prevention: Scope

While it seems that scholars and stakeholders can agree that prevention should be prioritised over reaction, an agreement on the scope and nature of this prevention does not seem especially likely. Morris, a key proponent of prioritising prevention, seems to treat it as synonymous with the R2P's second pillar by pairing it alongside the norm's 'capacity-building and assistive elements' (2016, p. 212). In doing so, the implication is that prevention should be limited to exclusively non-coercive means of responding to budding mass atrocities. By privileging prevention as non-coercive cooperation with states, however, prevention faces many challenges. Centrally, as the UNSG acknowledged in his 2009 report on the R2P, assistance is misguided if 'the political leadership of the State is determined to commit crimes and violations' (UNGA, 2009a, p. 15). Giving exclusive cooperative assistance to states and their leaders risks putting vulnerable groups at greater risk while reducing their agency. Indeed, in many cases where populations are vulnerable in part due to actions of colonial-era officials, ignoring them in favour of perpetuating an international system formed by centuries of imperialism risks reproducing coloniality rather than challenging it. As such, it makes more sense to frame prevention as non-violent rather than non-coercive. In doing this, more weight can be given to measures such as capacity-building that is not state-led.

5.1.1. The “Minimalist” Camp

With this in mind, it is worth considering the positions on prevention academics and stakeholders commonly hold. In his survey of these positions, Gallagher (2022) broadly allocates experts into one of three different camps. The first of these camps – the minimalists – is one which Gallagher himself belongs to (2022, p. 1041) and can best be summarised by Mani and Weiss’ assertion that ‘if R2P means everything, it amounts to nothing’ (2011, p. 4). Gallagher asserts his view that demanding states develop as part of the R2P risks overwhelming the norm (2022, p. 1041). Gallagher’s premise faces a limitation, however, in that it is based in part on a correlation drawn between changes in a state’s Human Development Index (HDI) and when mass atrocities occurred within its borders. The HDI, however, is flawed, as it is *horizontal* inequality that is most conducive to the occurrence of mass atrocities, not inequality in general (EU, 2018, p. 5). While Gallagher does acknowledge this (2022, p. 1030) as well as the fact that ‘the lowest ranking countries (bottom twenty) are disproportionately vulnerable to atrocity crimes’ (2022, p. 1040), he still asserts that there is little evidence ‘that underdevelopment *leads* to mass atrocities’ (2022, p. 1041, my emphasis).

The central flaw of this position (and that of other minimalists) is the assumption that advocates of other camps are calling for development wholesale, rather than development which targets the poorest and most vulnerable. The potential for the norm to be overwhelmed is also hardly relevant here since, as established in this thesis’ introduction and reinforced throughout, the R-r2p is only wedded to the spirit of the R2P, not its letter. For the R-r2p (and perhaps most

pragmatically minded prevention practitioners), the important thing is not the R2P, so much as it is to “do” atrocity prevention. In this light, targeted development initiatives might in some cases be the most effective way of protecting vulnerable groups from mass atrocity crimes, and thus the most effective way of achieving the ends of the R2P, even if conducted through different means. Added to this pragmatic rationale is the moral weight conferred by the obligation to make reparation for colonial injustice. If this weight can, as argued in the previous chapter, make a demand as heavy as military intervention, it certainly calls for more than mere ‘short-term prevention and response’ (Gallagher, 2022, p. 1023). As such, the scope of prevention under the R2P demands more, given the *reparative grounding principle*.

5.1.2. The “Middle Ground” Camp

Next is the middle ground camp, which includes those who call for incorporating R2P more broadly into other agendas (Bellamy, 2015, p. 180; Bellamy and Dunne, 2016, p. 14; Newman, 2009, pp. 99-100; UNGA, 2015, p. 9), and those who call for broadening R2P to include root cause prevention and some economic development (McLoughlin, 2014, p. 426; Simon, 2012, p. 7). This has increasingly become the dominant view put forth in the UNSG’s yearly reports on the R2P (UNGA, 2009a, p. 19; UNGA, 2013, p. 11; UNGA, 2018, p. 4; UNGA, 2019, p. 6). This is perhaps unsurprising, given that, as O’Bannon writes, the ‘R2P has appeared to offer clear material incentives to developing countries’ (2016, p. 3). These incentives do much to mitigate the palatability problem, and mean that an approach which sits in this camp is more likely to satisfy the *sustainability principle*.

As such, proponents of this level of prevention widely acknowledge the importance of addressing horizontal inequality. While perhaps not entailing a complete focus on economic aid in the name of development, middle ground practitioners might, for instance, accept the utility of economic development as a means to an end, where the end is the prevention of mass atrocities. Root cause prevention might also include capacity-building in a less strictly economic sense, whether that be the provision of services, the reinforcement of civil society, or the empowerment of leaders and members of vulnerable groups (APCR2P, 2023, p. 5; ICISS, 2001, p. 23). Advocates of this level of atrocity prevention adopt perhaps the most prudent position, that any measure whose primary purpose and goal is atrocity prevention falls within the bounds of the preventive remit. This type of approach is far more likely to satisfy the *reparative effectiveness principle* and the *sustainability principle* in terms of cost, since it entails a pragmatic responsibility to build resilience without becoming overly burdensome.

5.1.3. The “Radical” Camp

While both minimalists and members of the middle ground camp are broadly supportive of the R2P as is, the radicals stand in contrast to this, opting instead to ‘either challenge the RtoP [...] or reject it’ (Gallagher, 2022, p. 1021). While it is likely true that even proponents of the R2P are continually challenging and reforming it, radicals go much further than this. Dunford and Neu, for instance, argue in favour of abandoning the norm altogether since it legitimises militarism and other norms are more appropriate for protecting the vulnerable (2019, p. 1096). Most radicals, however, focus on reforming and broadening the norm rather than doing away with it

entirely. While some are in agreement with Dunford and Neu's stance on the R2P and its militarism, they imply that the norm is still viable so long as prevention wholly takes the place of military and other coercive measures (Morris, 2016, p. 212; Moses, 2019, p. 236).

Others suggest that the norm does not go far enough. Brown and Bohm, for example, argue that R2P ultimately requires 'robust commitments to global distributive justice' (2016, p. 902). Others have emphasised the need to address the harms committed by 'global economic institutions' (Lafont, 2015, p. 74), the 'unequal international order' (Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 319), and 'global systems' (Bohm and Brown, 2020, p. 72). As noted above, such perspectives contrast starkly with that of the minimalists' desire to avoid economic assistance beyond short-term aid, but it even goes far beyond the position adopted by middle ground proponents. According to these authors, prevention demands not only a commitment to economic development, but to a reworking of the entire global order and its constituent systems since they contribute to the vulnerability of populations to mass atrocity crimes. While there may be some moral weight to this (especially when action is driven by a desire to make reparation), such reforms should be thought of as long-term goals, rather than the best means of mass atrocity prevention. While an approach in alignment with the "radical" camp is likely to best satisfy the *reparative grounding principle*, given its focus on the structural legacies of colonialism, it also risks becoming unfeasible given the cost constraints and narrow focus of the R-r2p. Accordingly, a wholesale adoption of the scope of prevention advocated by the "radical" camp is unlikely to meet the *sustainability principle*.

5.1.4. The Scope of Prevention under the R-r2p

Having set out the various perspectives on the scope of prevention, it is now possible to consider the extent of its scope under the R-r2p. This scope is primarily determined by the *reparative grounding* and *reparative effectiveness* principles, though each of the other principles provides additional constraints. It is possible from the outset to rule out a minimalist approach to prevention, even without adding the extra weight of reparative obligation. While it is worth acknowledging that, given the scale of mass atrocity violations occurring around the world, some triage is necessary, rejecting any efforts to provide solutions to root-cause factors risks doing little to effectively and conclusively protect vulnerable populations from mass atrocities in any lasting way. An analogy serves to demonstrate this. Consider, for instance, a scenario where a perpetrator has broken someone's door and as such the victim is unable to sleep in their house. The perpetrator acknowledges their culpability and offers to make reparation by paying for the victim to stay in a hotel room for the night; however, the door is not repaired or replaced in any lasting way as the victim cannot afford to do so. The perpetrator may have provided a short-term solution but has not addressed the root of the victim's vulnerability, nor the injustice they perpetrated. Prioritising short-term prevention leads to a scenario where the consequences of a historic injustice like British colonialism are not addressed, and thus reparation is not made.

The approach to prevention set out by this thesis is thus more compatible with the approaches advocated for by the middle ground and radical camp proponents. As such, prevention might entail humanitarian assistance as a bare minimum, a responsibility to rebuild in the aftermath of atrocities, development aid, capacity building, and efforts to strengthen resilience. Each of these will be considered in turn

over the course of this chapter. While there is certainly an imperative for any system of reparations which aims to address British colonialism to reform and rework the coloniality of the international system, such a challenge is beyond the scope at least of the R-r2p (though some attention will be paid to this challenge in Chapter 6). As stated previously, this thesis is not making the case that the R-r2p should be the extent of colonial reparation, but more simply that reparation for colonialism should guide the UK's approach to atrocity prevention. As such, it makes sense to prioritise measures which have a more direct and proven link to improving the safety of those vulnerable to mass atrocity crimes, while acknowledging that greater reforms should be championed in the wider scheme. This chapter also does not deny that there are many different ways of "doing" prevention, but the focus of this chapter will primarily be on economic and other non-violent means of assistance.

5.2. Humanitarian Assistance: Classicist or Solidarist

In addressing the vulnerability of populations to mass atrocity crimes, it is most important to first ensure that such groups have their basic requirements met. Alongside trying to ensure the safety of populations from physical danger (as explored in the previous chapter), the security of the individual concerns more than the merely existential. Centrally, populations that are victim to mass atrocity crimes are especially vulnerable in that they are unlikely to have easy access to food, water, warmth, and other necessities (Pattison, 2018, pp. 205-6; Wood and Sullivan, 2015, p. 746). In Sudan, for instance, as of January 2026, an estimated 33.7 million people are recognised as in need of humanitarian assistance (WHO, 2026). The nature of this humanitarian assistance, however, has been the subject of debate. First,

humanitarian assistance (or aid) might be considered *reaction* not *prevention*, in that it largely comes *after* a mass atrocity crime has already taken place. As above, the temporal division between prevention and reaction seems somewhat nebulous, more semantic than practical. Second, it is unclear whether humanitarian assistance should be minimalist or maximalist in nature (Weiss, 1999, p. 4). In other words, how one “does” humanitarian assistance must be considered when assessing whether such aid is truly reparative in nature – this might involve not only what goods are provided, but more importantly *how* and to *whom* such goods are provided.

Humanitarian assistance is routinely included in the R2P’s pillar II and pillar III, though some have argued that the norms should be kept separate in that the perceived toxicity of the latter risks endangering the legitimacy of the former (Pattison, 2018, pp. 207-8). Regardless, humanitarian assistance is an appropriate, if possibly ineffective, way of responding to mass atrocities (Pattison, 2018, pp. 205-6; Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 362). This assistance, while unlikely to *stop* any ongoing mass atrocities (Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 341), is vital in addressing the secondary consequences of violence. Indeed, as Lazell and Petrikova write, ‘humanitarian aid often brings about significant benefits, saving livelihoods as well as lives’ (2025, pp. 328-9). It is understandable, then, that many have thought of this type of immediate emergency aid as *reaction* not *prevention*, but such a myopic view fails to consider the potential for revictimisation. If populations are unable to meet their basic socio-economic needs, they may be forced to take drastic actions to meet them, possibly endangering them further. Further to this, efforts to find resources to meet such needs might result in a type of ethnic cleansing, a mass atrocity in itself. Finally, when faced with competition to meet basic socio-economic needs, groups may be pushed into resource-driven conflicts,

which in turn may give rise to mass atrocities. Indeed, while it is not inevitable that resource-scarcity will lead to mass atrocities, it is true that competition in these contexts often leads to escalating violence, as in Sudan (GCR2P, 2026d). In this sense, the provision of aid might not stop ongoing mass atrocities, but it could potentially reduce the likelihood of future atrocities.

5.2.1. The Limitations of a Classicist Approach

Weiss divides the different perspectives on humanitarian assistance and their respect for state sovereignty into four different groups: Classicists, Minimalists, Maximalists, and Solidarists (1999, p. 4). Where Classicists might believe in purely neutral humanitarian assistance that respects state sovereignty and provides goods and services equally, Solidarists operate at the other end of the spectrum, taking the side of victims and allocating goods accordingly (Weiss, 1999, p. 4). Reproducing and deliberating on the moral arguments in favour of each position here is beyond the scope of the chapter, though it is worth exploring how the principle of reparation affects which position is most appropriate when it comes to delivering humanitarian assistance under the R-r2p. At play here is not only the level of respect which the UK is to pay to state sovereignty when making reparation, but also the extent to which the UK should champion the plights of the vulnerable.

Initially, one might believe that it would be misguided for a reparations-based approach to mass atrocity prevention to operate under any framework other than that set out by the Classicists, given the importance of non-interference to historically colonised states. This is the traditional view adopted by humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross, that ‘humanitarian action can and should be completely

insulated from politics' (Weiss, 1999, p. 2). Indeed, humanitarian assistance is said to be guided by the core principles of 'humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence' (Rose et al., 2013, p. 75). Sceptics of the R2P such as Kuperman also adopt this approach to humanitarian aid, on the basis that any preferential treatment is a moral hazard; that is (as discussed in Section 4.4), likely to encourage non-state armed groups and thereby increase the incidence of mass atrocities (2009, pp. 26-7). This approach might be understood as the most effective in acquiring access which, as Wight and Cowper-Smith note, increases the effectiveness of humanitarian aid (2022, p. 374). In theory, this would also prevent the UK from overstepping its mandate and in many ways reproducing colonial modes of domination (violation of the *non-domination principle*).

Adopting the Classicist approach means that the UK would treat state sovereignty as near-absolute (in contrast to the R2P norm) while doing whatever it could within those constraints. There are many good reasons to be wary of this approach, but it is worth first considering what benefits might be gained from doing so. Given the primacy of sovereignty for many governments in the Global South, the most reparative option may be to respect the principle if reparation is understood as primarily *owed to the state*. Likewise, a proportional distribution of resources rather than a preferential provision primarily to victims in some ways might seem to be the best way for the UK to eschew repeating former colonial wrongs such as the discriminatory treatment offered to some groups and not others under the policies of indirect rule. As such, by adopting a Classicist approach, the UK could acknowledge the injustices stemming from its colonial past while repaying its debt by respecting the state as absolute in all matters inside its own borders. This has the potential to

satisfy the *agency principle*, at least insofar as reparation is owed to the state executive itself.

While seemingly the best option on the surface, adopting a Classicist approach to humanitarian assistance under the R-r2p is not the most effective way of making reparation. Rather, it is a route through which the UK might pay lip service to reparation while washing its hands of the real legacies of its injustices. As with military measures, while it might seem more prudent for the UK to prioritise cooperative and non-coercive humanitarian aid wherever possible, there are many instances where the prioritisation of working in tandem with the state is morally risky. In cases where it is the government committing mass atrocities, such as in Myanmar and Sudan, it seems very unlikely that the state would be willing to permit humanitarian aid. Indeed, Myanmar's junta has been criticised for denying groups in Rakhine (the centre of much of the violence in the state) access to basic necessities (Al Jazeera, 2023; Kaur, 2024).

In other instances, the state might only permit humanitarian aid where it serves its own interests (Abeytia et al., 2023, p. 341), thereby tacitly recruiting the UK to provide assistance towards its own ends. This might take the form of selective assistance, provided only to those who are in the government's favour and need the aid far less. Alternatively, the ruling government might encourage aid in a specific area in order to incentivise groups it is targeting to flee there as a form of ethnic cleansing. In such cases, the ruling government might even take advantage by appropriating aid for their own purposes or by targeting the now geographically consolidated groups. In this sense, by attempting not to reproduce colonial modes of domination, the UK is doing little to address the vulnerability of groups that it has contributed towards and therefore does little to satisfy the *reparative effectiveness*

principle. Further to this, in line with the *agency principle*, reparation is owed not only to the state executive but more importantly to those who reside in its borders. Understanding sovereignty as inviolable thus has the potential to increase the victimisation of those at risk, even while respecting the state itself. Dunford even goes as far as to argue that such an understanding of sovereignty might in fact reproduce coloniality since it gives further credibility to colonial creations at the expense of minority groups artificially included within their borders (Dunford, 2025, pp. 622-3). As such, it is necessary to abstain from the Classicist approach.

5.2.2. A Reparative Solidarist Approach

If the goal of this thesis' mode of atrocity prevention is to both help the vulnerable and to make reparation, then, it would be unwise to adopt the Classicist approach. This approach is insufficient under a reparative lens. Rather, as with the perspectives on prevention discussed above, it is likely that humanitarian aid under a reparative approach to atrocity prevention would be closer to the critical end of the spectrum. At this end are Solidarists who, according to Weiss, 'advocate controversial public policy, [...] take the side of selected victims, [...] skew the balance of resource allocation, [...] and] override sovereignty as necessary' (1999, p. 4). Despite the potential of this approach, prudence would suggest that the UK be wary of these elements, lest it do damage to its framework of reparation while trying to make good on it. It is especially worth being cautious of any measures which might be deemed exceedingly controversial, display excessive bias, or contravene sovereignty to the extent that it might lend credence to the neo-colonial critique of atrocity prevention discussed in previous chapters.

In some instances, for example, the UK might need to work through defensive means such as safe zones to ensure that aid can be accessed (Jacob, 2018, p. 321). According to a Solidarist approach, however, such an action is appropriate even though it overrides state sovereignty. While Solidarists might be willing to overlook that this action is likely to be problematic, it is still worth being conscious of the fact that such an action risks violating the *non-domination principle*, thereby exacerbating the palatability problem. As explained in Section 4.4, establishing a safe zone without the consent of the state could be perceived as a precursor to further military action in the international community, and thus must be done carefully to ensure that the UK's reparative efforts are not rendered suspect. Establishing safe zones is likely to be more feasible when a government lacks comprehensive authority. In Sudan, for instance, it might be possible for the UK to work with local authorities on either side to protect the most vulnerable. This is a route best available in mass atrocity scenarios taking place during civil war. Otherwise, humanitarian aid may require working through intermediaries, perhaps by providing funds to legitimate groups on the ground who have found ways to provide aid beyond the state's oversight in order to mitigate the palatability problem.

In instances where one group is overwhelmingly victimised in contrast to others, such as Myanmar, it makes sense for the UK to prioritise the provision of aid to this group. As explained above, some might view this as a reproduction of the divide and rule inherent to British colonial rule given the view among some scholars that humanitarian aid can encourage enduring violence by both the state and rebel groups (Narang, 2015, p. 184; Wood and Sullivan, 2015, p. 736). Such an argument pays little attention, however, to what an "end" to violence would really mean. Holding political neutrality as sacrosanct above all else results not in reparation, but

often in complicity in atrocities (Aloudat and Khan, 2022). Ignoring local interests in favour of the state itself risks violating the *agency principle*, and consequently doing more harm than good (Rose et al., 2013). Furthermore, humanitarian aid in this instance is the provision of the bare socio-economic necessities required to live; it is not as if the UK would be empowering a group to overthrow its oppressors in this scenario, only to live. Acknowledging that the UK has contributed to the vulnerability of groups to whom it provides aid might also serve to quell the neo-colonial objections. While Solidarist thought might be ideal in that it aims to prioritise victims, it is necessary in some instances to abstain from adopting such a perspective entirely, since a pragmatic approach is likely to most satisfactorily meet the R-r2p's guiding framework, especially the *sustainability principle*. Abstaining from violating sovereignty might also in some instances be necessary to gain access. Regardless of the exact specifics of the approach adopted, it is certainly true that, to meet the UK's reparative obligations, more humanitarian aid is needed, not less (Ralph and Souter, 2015, p. 711).

5.3. A Responsibility to Rebuild

While humanitarian aid is certainly one requirement of assistance within the scope of the R-r2p, it is only the minimum required. Aid is largely short-term, focused on responding to imminent crises and the harms faced by populations who have fled mass atrocities. Humanitarian assistance should be thought of as an emergency measure, as triage rather than cure. As with the R2P, however, it is early action that is most important for any framework of atrocity prevention (UNGA, 2018, p. 4). As a preventive measure, it is the most downstream option available, and a focus on

humanitarian aid risks ignoring the roots of mass atrocities. As such, states must instead ask how we might stop mass atrocities from happening in the first place; or, perhaps, how they might be stopped from happening *again*. Indeed, while broad development assistance is ideal in helping to build resilience (as will be discussed in the following section), it is populations that have already experienced mass atrocities that are most vulnerable to future crimes (UN, 2014, p. 11). The current crisis in South Sudan exemplifies this, with a failure to comprehensively rebuild after the 2013-2015 civil war leading to renewed atrocity risk (GCR2P, 2026c). While rebuilding might be understood as reactive rather than preventive, this type of development is still driven by a desire to *prevent* future atrocities rather than to stop those which are ongoing. In this light, it is worth first exploring the role of development assistance under the responsibility to rebuild before considering measures further upstream.

In drafting the initial ICISS report outlining the R2P, the members of the Commission notably argued in favour of a ‘responsibility to rebuild’ after mass atrocities end alongside responsibilities to assist and react (ICISS, 2001, p. 39). The rationale for this was that even if atrocities had been stopped, the root causes would often still need to be addressed through other measures such as ‘promoting good governance and sustainable development’ (ICISS, 2001, p. 39). Despite its inclusion in the Commission’s report, the responsibility to rebuild was notably absent from the version of the R2P agreed upon by states in 2005 (Paris, 2014, p. 577). This omission has been derided as a failure of the norm, and many scholars and practitioners have called for its re-inclusion (Bellamy, 2008, p. 638; Ercan, 2022, p. 299; Evans, 2016b, pp. 923-4). It is also unsurprising that this responsibility is central to China’s concept of RP (Garwood-Gowers, 2016, p. 108).

Rebuilding serves two primary purposes. First, it helps to prevent the recurrence of atrocities by addressing their root causes and serves to mitigate the extent to which the extra harms generated by mass violence compound preexisting vulnerabilities.¹⁷ A state with a weak institutional or economic climate, for instance, is likely to be in a worse position following mass violence than prior. This is particularly important in the case studies of this thesis, where such states already experience structural legacies such as horizontal economic inequalities and weak institutions as a result of colonial injustice. As such, a heightened responsibility to rebuild is likely to satisfy both the *reparative grounding* and *reparative effectiveness* principles.

Second, committing to a responsibility to rebuild indicates that the international community is truly invested in the well-being of a state for the long run. The responsibility to rebuild was initially imagined as an obligation following military intervention (ICISS, 2001, p. 39), and its omission does much to damage the legitimacy of any such effort. From a cynical perspective, one might argue that China's elevation of the (additional) responsibility to rebuild in its RP framework is intended to dissuade states from intervening, since a state might be unlikely to do so if it also entails costly economic investment. On the other hand, it is certainly true that demonstrating a continued commitment to the well-being of vulnerable populations does much to strengthen the project of mass atrocity prevention, thereby making it more sustainable.

There are many good arguments, then, for the (re)inclusion of the responsibility to rebuild in any atrocity prevention framework, both moral and

¹⁷ Preventing the recurrence of mass atrocities is particularly important in mass atrocity prevention, as a history of mass killing is a significant predictor of future atrocities. In the Early Warning Project's 2025-26 assessment of countries at risk for mass killings, for instance, each of the highest ranked countries has experienced a mass killing in the past (EWP, 2025, pp. 7-8).

practical. On this basis, it seems obvious to include this responsibility within the R-r2p – it is not as if the extra weight carried by the UK's reparative duties should *reduce* its obligation to rebuild. It is still necessary, however, to sketch out how exactly a commitment to the responsibility to rebuild serves a reparative function, and how the UK ought to go about meeting this commitment. While Pattison disagrees with the notion that interveners should be responsible for rebuilding as unfair (2013, pp. 4-5), there are good reasons for the UK to assist in the rebuilding process after intervention. As mentioned in the previous chapter, rebuilding after intervention is a vital means through which to mitigate the harms incurred by pursuing that non-ideal option. As above, demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of states in which it intervenes would help to deter a perception that the state is interested solely in short-term solutions, thereby increasing the likelihood that the R-r2p is sustainable. Such a commitment thus has the added effect of addressing the palatability problem faced by other measures also. While this responsibility to rebuild might be required after intervention, what about cases where the UK is not the intervening agent?

In such instances, the weight is just as significant, though stemming from different sources. If the responsibility to rebuild following intervention is to rectify the harms incurred, then the responsibility to rebuild when abstaining from intervention stems from the abstention. In other words, it is the very inaction of the UK in contexts prior to the cessation of mass atrocities that obligates it to rebuild in their aftermath. In many ways this is a preferable outcome compared to that described above, as it is far from ideal for the UK to commit military intervention given the damage it might do to the state's reparative efforts. Though Pattison argues that interveners should not be expected to rebuild as they may not have the right to do so (2013, pp. 5-6), his

argument might be taken further to suggest that a state that is in any way culpable for a mass atrocity crisis should not lead rebuilding efforts. As Pattison acknowledges, however, those with reparative duties need not always be the actors who rebuild directly; rather, agents that are in some way culpable can instead bear the duty to fund such efforts (2013, p. 6).

Whether leading the efforts or simply funding them, this type of rebuilding is thus more likely to satisfy the *non-domination principle* and as such be more sustainable. A responsibility to rebuild in this case achieves the same reparative function as humanitarian aid and development assistance and is likely to fall somewhere between the two practically speaking. As such, reparation made through the responsibility to rebuild is also more likely to be welcomed by the populations aided by such efforts. As with other measures discussed in this chapter, the UK must ensure that its rebuilding efforts prioritise the agency and empowerment of local populations, working through cooperation, not dictation. This is the approach called for by proponents of the responsibility to rebuild regardless (ICISS, 2001, p. 44) but is given additional weight under a reparative approach to mass atrocity prevention. By rebuilding *with* populations, the UK can demonstrate a willingness to atone for its past, avoid reproducing coloniality, and develop its reparative agenda.

5.4. Development Aid: Who and How?

While the responsibility to rebuild certainly serves to further the goals of prevention under the R-r2p, more is needed in order to deepen the resilience that is engendered in its earliest stages through the responsibility to rebuild. For this, we must turn to development in a more general sense. This thesis draws two main

distinctions between development offered through the responsibility to rebuild and development more broadly, as suggested above. These distinctions are, first, temporal (the responsibility to rebuild is understood to focus more on development in the immediate aftermath of crises, whereas development assistance can happen at any time), and second, target-based (the former measure places greater emphasis on development as atrocity prevention in comparison to the latter). While broader development might be perceived as beyond the scope of the R2P, and thus mass atrocity prevention more generally, by some scholars (Gallagher, 2022, p. 1041; Mani and Weiss, 2011, p. 4) there is merit to its preventive potential. Indeed, the role that development might play has been well-established, if under-operationalised (ICISS, 2001, p. 23; McLoughlin, 2014, p. 426; Simon, 2012, p. 7; UNGA, 2009a, p. 19; UNGA, 2013, p. 11; UNGA, 2018, p. 4; UNGA, 2019, p. 6; UNGA, 2023, p. 5). The reason for this is simple: poverty reduces resilience to mass atrocities (Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1084).

In some cases, poverty might even *incentivise* mass atrocities. In Nigeria, for instance, the GCR2P's investigations have noted that violence stemming from these resource-based tensions has resulted in atrocities, including murder, rape, and mass kidnapping (GCR2P, 2026b). In South Sudan also, more is needed than the assistance given under rebuilding remits, since identity-based violence is in part driven by 'tensions over access to resources' (GCR2P, 2026c). As established in Chapter 2, the structural economic inequalities that persist across these states can be causally linked to the injustices of British rule, thereby necessitating a response. As such, development assistance is likely to easily satisfy the *reparative grounding principle* and has the potential to satisfy the *reparative effectiveness principle*. Indeed, as stated in Section 5.1, the R-r2p is most aligned with the "middle ground"

position that development serves the purpose of mass atrocity prevention, and is sympathetic to the “radical” camp.

It is still necessary to answer two linked questions: how can the UK provide development assistance in a way which is both effective in preventing mass atrocities and suitable as a means of reparation for colonial injustices? Indeed, “development” is not a neutral or fixed concept – the current international practice of “development” has largely been neo-liberal in nature, which Neilson argues has contributed to uneven development (Neilson, 2020, p. 87). Scholars have noted that development assistance has come under fire from both sides, with some saying it is harmful to recipient countries, and others saying the current scale of funding is insufficient (Edwards, 2015, p. 277; Hermes and Lensink, 2019, p. 3). Providing an answer as to whether development assistance is always harmless here is beyond the scope of the thesis; rather, the focus here is instead merely to propose possible avenues of development through which reparation and resilience might be sought. The “most” reparative approach to development is likely to be one that aligns with the R-r2p’s guiding principles, and, as explained in Chapter 2, ‘foregrounds wellbeing and social good rather than [solely] growth’ (Russel, 2022, p. 1080). Centrally, this means that it will not reproduce colonial modes of domination, that it will be explicitly welcomed by populations who are recipients of development assistance, and that it will not be excessively costly to the extent that it imperils future efforts. In order to meet these guiding principles and to avoid the challenges highlighted above, three elements must be considered: motivation, conditionality, and agency.

5.4.1. Limited Self-interest

Self-interest should not be the primary rationale for meaningful reparation, yet development assistance provided by the Global North to the Global South has often been understood as driven by it (Clausen and Albrecht, 2021, p. 1219). Reparation is concerned with atonement and doing justice to victims (De Greiff, 2006, p. 455), not with how the guilty party might benefit themselves. Development which is primarily motivated by national self-interest is simultaneously unlikely to be an appropriate form of reparation for colonial injustice *or* effectively build resilience. In some ways, offering development (even *increased* development assistance) in such a manner is an echo of colonial-era foreign policy. The British Empire was framed to some extent as a selfless “civilising” mission, though the real purpose seems to have been exploitation and self-enrichment. Neoliberal development which purports to help the impoverished but does so in ways which serve the UK’s economic interests is not so different. In addition to the intended consequences of self-interested development, it can even have *unintended* consequences. Indeed, Lazell and Petrikova found that development initiatives which were guided by self-interest were less likely to bring about lasting change (2025, pp. 325-8). A prioritisation of self-interest can be challenged on several bases then: it is in contravention of the spirit of reparation, it is less likely to be welcomed as reparation, and it is less likely to be effective (Acht et al., 2014, p. 20). In this sense, self-interested development is likely to face both the efficacy and palatability problems.

This is not to say, however, that the UK cannot benefit from the development assistance it provides *at all*. As Mawdsley writes, there are many ways in which even seemingly selfless development assistance can be beneficial to the donor state (2017, p. 226), perhaps in the form of improved bilateral relations or peace and

security. In many cases where self-interest is overt, however, UK development assistance has 'strained bilateral relations' (Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, p. 331). As with military intervention and other reparative or humanitarian measures, the issue is not so much that the UK cannot benefit, but that self-interest must not be its *primary* rationale for any particular measure. After all, 'there is nothing inherently contradictory in principle about "win-win" outcomes' (Mawdsley, 2017, p. 226). While it is certainly possible to argue that states might be suspicious of development assistance if there is any inclination the UK stands to benefit, this could perhaps be mitigated by framing all reparative assistance overtly as reparation, alongside demonstrations of contrition through other modes of reparation such as apologies.

It is also possible that any form of reparative assistance is in the UK's self-interest. A reconceptualisation of the national interest is vital. For instance, development assistance has clear soft power implications (Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, p. 332; Mawdsley, 2017, p. 227), helping to establish the UK as a state willing to share its wealth. By rightly framing its efforts as reparative, the UK might also ameliorate its relations with its own former colonies, as well as states in the Global South more broadly (Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, p. 332). In other words, as with a more robust asylum policy, reparative development assistance helps to establish the UK as a "good international citizen" (Dunford and Neu, 2019, p. 1090; Souter, 2016, p. 797; Souter, 2022, p. 25) and contribute to the task of moral repair. In addition to this, by linking development to mass atrocity prevention, the latter is to some extent detoxified. Accordingly, this measure is very likely to satisfy the *sustainability principle*.

5.4.2. Local Ownership: Agency and Empowerment

The reparative legitimacy of development assistance can also be increased by ensuring that recipients are guaranteed agency. This is relevant in two senses. First, agency must be safeguarded by limiting the number of conditions placed on recipients of development assistance. Traditional development assistance has often come with requirements (Doornbos, 2019, p. 107; Hermes and Lensink, 2019, p. 7). Such conditions have been challenged on the basis that they in many ways make recipients of development assistance poorer, not richer (Hermes and Lensink, 2019, p. 3; Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, p. 324). The insecurity generated by such conditions might foster resentment between groups, contributing to mass atrocity risk. Additionally, such conditions might be perceived as driven by self-interest. While one might understand conditions as intended to achieve the best outcomes, Dalgaard and Hansen's model suggests that 'aid spurs growth regardless' (2019, p. 38). In this sense, conditions have no place in a reparative framework like the R-r2p *under ideal conditions*. Where a perpetrator has committed a grave injustice, they should not dictate the scale of reparation (though, they might reject excessively costly or unrealistic reparative demands, as briefly discussed in regard to *sustainability* in Section 3.5). It is also not appropriate for the agent to level additional requirements in order for its victim to receive justice. As explained above, this is given extra weight when the development assistance owed to former colonies by the UK is not only making up for past injustice but is funded by wealth extracted from former colonies. According to this argument, placing conditions on development assistance is doubly unjust, reproducing colonial modes of domination while making victims jump through hoops to have their own wealth restored to them.

While conditions in most instances might seem to damage the reparative mission of development assistance under the R-r2p, there are certain instances where they might still be desirable, even if non-ideal. Beyond ensuring that development assistance does not reproduce colonial modes of domination, the UK must ensure that it is sustainable, welcomed by populations within the state, and that it is likely to contribute to mass atrocity prevention efforts. It is thus necessary to consider whether there are any scenarios in which conditions might be necessary. For instance, offering development assistance unconditionally – allowing states to do as they wish – might in some instances result in a less than equitable distribution of resources. Ideally the UK would be best prioritising the poorest states among its former colonies when making reparation through development assistance. Not only is the impact of development assistance likely to be higher in poorer states (Guillaumont and Chauvet, 2019, p. 87), but such assistance would also likely contribute the most to mass atrocity prevention endeavours since it is these states which are most vulnerable. On the other hand, states which are disproportionately vulnerable to atrocity crimes likely have other factors contributing to this precarity beyond widespread poverty. Many of these states are currently experiencing crises, making development assistance challenging (Sudan and Myanmar, for example). Development assistance in states which are not in crisis might still do more harm than good if done incorrectly. In Cameroon (another former British colony), for instance, it is not merely poverty that is weakening mass atrocity resilience, but competition between Anglophone and Francophone speaking regions fomented by the state (GCR2P, 2026e). In cases such as these, conditions might be attached requiring development aid to be employed equitably.

While such conditions can be challenged on the basis that they infringe upon the sovereignty of the post-colonial state, this non-ideal solution is still preferable to the alternative. Rather than challenging the sovereignty directly, however, the UK might choose to circumvent intransigent or untrustworthy governments by working directly with populations on the ground. As established, there is some ambiguity as to whom it is that the UK primarily owes reparation – the state, or populations within the state. Even if its primary obligations are to populations, some duties might be most easily met *through* the state where access is a necessity. However, this thesis is sympathetic to the argument that (especially when governments are not formed by consent of the governed) reparation is owed to all those who inhabit a territory rather than any one group. This is especially important when a group who has been imperilled by legacies of the UK's colonial conduct cannot be helped *because* they are targeted by the state, as with the Rohingya in Myanmar and many non-Arab groups in Sudan. While the challenge to a state's sovereignty might be perceived as neo-colonial, this is the cost of making reparation directly to the UK's historic victims. In other words, under non-ideal conditions where the state is abusive and corrupt, flouting sovereignty may be a necessity.

Agency can also be more thoroughly guaranteed by giving vulnerable populations more control over their own economic fates. Such treatment would have several benefits. If the UK treats those whom it provides development assistance not as *recipients* but rather 'as 'partners' and 'peers' in development efforts' (Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, p. 329), then the reparative value is multiplied. In achieving this, the UK must also try to remove some of the international and institutional barriers to development that many states continue to face (Bohm and Brown, 2020, p. 72; Collste, 2015, p. 32; Hutchings, 2010, p. 123), which many have argued has

contributed to mass atrocity risk (Brown and Bohm, 2016, p. 902; Lafont, 2015, p. 74; Mallavarapu, 2015, p. 319). While outright institutional reform is perhaps beyond the power of the UK, and certainly beyond the scope of the R-r2p, the UK should at least desist from its role in perpetuating them (Brown and Bohm, 2016, p. 910).¹⁸

This is a requirement of good international citizenship given extra weight by the demands of reparation. Alongside this, providing assistance in a way that empowers local groups is very likely to be welcomed by populations and increase the likelihood that development initiatives will succeed (Lazell and Petrikova, 2025, pp. 328-9).

While providing development assistance to marginalised groups might increase the likelihood that they will be targeted, or be perceived by some as an echo of colonial-era favouritism, the goal of sub-state development assistance is not to enrich specific groups but only to reduce horizontal inequality.

Development assistance which empowers states and local populations to forge their own futures and is driven by a desire to make reparation rather than self-interest, then, is likely a very effective way to make reparation for colonial-era injustice. Importantly, though, we must turn to whether this type of development assistance is likely to reduce the risk of mass atrocity crimes. As stated above, practitioners have long emphasised the need to link development assistance to mass atrocity prevention, and even to the R2P. It is difficult to gauge, however, to what extent any specific development initiative would stop an atrocity from taking place (the efficacy problem). In some ways, this is not so important. Development assistance is an upstream solution to mass atrocities – a way of hopefully reducing their likelihood. It is also far less toxic and controversial than many of the more

¹⁸ While the R-r2p must remain pragmatically narrow (as established previously), some attention will be paid to the role of diplomatic advocacy for institutional reform in Chapter 6.

coercive elements of mass atrocity prevention such as military options. In this light, it might make sense for the UK to prioritise economic means such as development assistance under the R-r2p. Importantly, the UK frames its assistance not only as reparative, but as intended to prevent mass atrocities. While linking frameworks such as refugee protection to atrocity prevention risks tainting the former with the toxicity of the latter (and vice versa, as mentioned in Section 4.5), linking development assistance to atrocity prevention would have the opposite effect. By emphasising that the intentions of states like the UK (and the West more broadly) are not merely to interfere, but to provide material incentives, such states *and* the norm of atrocity prevention can be rehabilitated.

5.5. Building Resilience through Democracy

While development has often been highlighted as a generally palatable approach to root cause prevention, it is not the only means. Indeed, there are a range of possible measures through which the state and international society more broadly might improve the resilience of vulnerable populations to mass atrocity crimes (ICISS, 2001, p. 23). International organisations have attempted to codify these measures into atrocity prevention toolkits (APCR2P, 2003; EU, 2018; UN, 2014), through which actors might adopt a more coherently organised approach to the prevention of atrocities. One key (and, in many ways, controversial) proposal has been to democratise at-risk societies (Bellamy, 2014, p. 185; UNGA, 2023, p. 5). This does not necessarily mean the establishment of full electoral democracy, but also the strengthening of free and independent civil societies and media (APCR2P, 2023, p. 5; ICISS, 2001, p. 23). Experts have also advised that any efforts to

democratise be considered alongside development assistance (UNGA, 2023, p. 5).

The driving force behind this proposal is the argument that strong, democratic institutions make mass atrocities less likely (Bellamy, 2014, p. 36; McLoughlin, 2015, p. 27; UNGA, 2023, p. 5), in part because political instability is recognised as a key risk factor for mass atrocity crimes (EU, 2018, p. 5; UN, 2014, p. 10).

Atrocity prevention through democratisation, however, has been increasingly controversial since the 2011 intervention in Libya resulted in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, even if this was not the sole motivation. While there is some weight to the argument that the only way to prevent future atrocities in Libya was to replace Gaddafi as the state's leader, the way in which the intervening forces went about achieving this has done little to win over sceptics. As mentioned previously, this intervention has done much to link mass atrocity prevention with Western-led regime change (Anabiri and Mashau, 2024, p. 71), which is likely to render any effort to democratise with prevention in mind especially suspect. While in some cases efforts to democratise may have been driven by motivations other than the moral, studies have shown that mass atrocities *are* less likely in democratic states. Indeed, in their meta-analysis of studies assessing the link between atrocities and democracy, Anderton and Brauer found that in general 'democracy correlates to low, and/or autocracy to high, mass atrocity risk [... and] mixed political regimes (anocracies) are at a greater risk than either' (2021, p. 1266). Likewise, in their statistical analysis, Easterly et al found that mass killings are 'less likely at very high levels of democracy' (2006, p. 129). Further to this, mass killings are most likely in the least democratic states (Easterly et al., 2006, p. 136). Authoritarian states such as Myanmar, Sudan, and South Sudan, or hybrid regimes such as Nigeria are therefore

at risk of mass atrocities on this basis. The crisis in South Sudan in particular has been linked to the failure to deliver promised elections (GCR2P, 2026c).

5.5.1. Limits and Risks of Democratisation

The link between democracy and resilience to mass atrocities is not absolute, however. While the strengthening of pre-existing democracies in states might help to build resilience, the prioritisation of democracy above all else in non-democratic states often has harsher consequences than working with an entrenched autocratic government. Indeed, prioritising the implementation of democracy often means that other risk factors are ignored. As Bellamy writes, often such measures should be ‘deferred in favor of the imperative to [...] protect vulnerable populations’ (2014, p. 185). A critical example of when this did not happen occurred in Myanmar, where the UK Foreign Office (among other actors) chose to believe democratisation was the best approach to protecting vulnerable populations in Rakhine (Ferguson, 2021, p. 254). Such a stance resulted in the UK supporting advocates of democracy who not only did not try to protect minorities such as the Rohingya, but even went as far as shielding perpetrators from any consequences (UNHRC, 2018, pp. 388-9). Such short-sightedness emphasises the complexity of democratisation for the purpose of atrocity prevention. Scholars have also highlighted how democratic transition is one of the most fraught periods for vulnerable populations (Anderton and Brauer, 2021, p. 1266; McLoughlin, 2015, p. 27). Likewise, Moses suggests that the tendency of scholars to believe that mass atrocities occur only in authoritarian states is a symptom of the Western bias of the R2P (2024, p. 213). There are good reasons,

then, to be wary of democratisation as a means of mass atrocity prevention, even if democracies are more resilient.

The question at stake, however, is not whether the former should be pursued to achieve the latter, but more specifically whether democratisation (but not regime change) has a place under the R-r2p. Initial inclination might be to oppose such a move; indeed, in some ways democratisation efforts could be seen to echo colonial-era policy. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the supposed “benefits” of British colonialism was that it “gave” indigenous populations democracy (Ferguson, 2003, p. 371). Some scholars even noted the relatively high democratic potential of former British colonies compared to those of other imperial powers (Bernhard et al., 2004, p. 245). It would be more accurate to say, however, that even if the UK did build democracy in some form, it did so only in a way that was in its own self-interest, rather than the interest of colonial populations. As mentioned in Chapter 2, efforts to install the “British” version of democracy resulted in many instances where less formal, indigenous democracy was destroyed, as in Myanmar (Alam, 2019, p. 17; Myint-U, 2004, pp. 253-4) and Nigeria (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p. 115; Shaka, 2005, p. 301).

Former colonies would understandably be doubly wary of British efforts to foster democracy – not only is it interfering, but it is doing so in a way that is reminiscent of past injustice. Instances where the UK shows a preference towards specific democratic groups (for example, towards specific parties or movements) would be particularly suspect as a means of reparation. Even in states which are already democratic, it would be unwise for the UK to seem to favour the success of any particular group. Likewise, imposing democracy or advocating for regime change through other means is likely to be problematic, even if it seems as if such actions

would be beneficial, for two reasons. First, efforts to build democracy without the cooperation and consent of local populations is unlikely to be successful – buy-in is likely to be reduced. Second, imposition of democracy without a legitimate sense of contrition would likely be perceived as hubris, not reparation, and would potentially harm the missions of reparation and atrocity prevention. This type of democratising effort would thus fail to satisfy the *sustainability principle*.

5.5.2. Reparative Democratisation: Ensuring Local Agency

Given the potential for democratisation to build resilience to mass atrocities, it does not make sense to rule it out entirely. A possible solution to the above challenges might be found by centring the initial injustice and building an approach which aims to rectify these. The initial injustice often involved, for instance, the implementation of flawed democratic institutions from above, as in Myanmar (Alam, 2019, p. 17; Myint-U, 2004, pp. 253-4), Nigeria (Shaka, 2005, p. 301), and Sudan/South Sudan (Theron, 2022, p. 26), and as such is likely to satisfy the *reparative grounding principle*. If the injustice here (among others) is that democracy was imposed unilaterally, then any model of reparation would necessitate rectifying this. As such, it makes sense for any attempts to foster or strengthen democracy in former colonies to be led not by the UK, but by the UK's historic victims. If the UK helped to destroy indigenous institutions in the past, then helping to build up *new* (or historical) indigenous institutions is reparative.

As with so many other areas pursued under the R-r2p, two of the most important elements of efforts to foster and strengthen democracy are agency and empowerment. In this instance, this means ensuring that populations of the state are

empowered and given the ability and capacity to drive democratisation efforts *should they wish*, so that the UK can at last return meaningful choice to populations upon whom it long ago imposed its will. As with all reparative efforts, framing is important here. The UK must emphasise that it is not attempting to impose democracy through regime change or strengthen the position of a particular party, but that it is rectifying its past crimes. The potential *reparative effectiveness* is also likely to be higher if agency and non-domination are safeguarded, as with broader development initiatives. In already democratic (or hybrid) states, this might entail building the capacity to ensure free and fair elections, empowering groups to feel heard. Such a process was the driving force behind the prevention of mass atrocities around the 2008 Kenyan elections, even if limited (Halakhe, 2013, p. 3). Similar measures might be pursued in regard to Nigeria, for instance. In states which are not democratic, this might still entail a type of local empowerment that encourages grass-roots decision making on a smaller scale. So long as democratic frameworks are not implemented from above but fostered in partnership, this measure is more likely to satisfy the *non-domination principle*.

This approach might reap several benefits, in contrast to that discussed above. First, by empowering and cooperating with local partners rather than assuming that it knows best, the UK's reparative agenda seems and also *is* much more legitimate. Neo-colonial hubris can give way to "good international citizenship", reframing the UK's relationship with the Global South as one of mutually beneficial cooperation. Alongside rehabilitating the diplomatic standing of the UK, it is likely to foster trust. Such trust is essential to furthering the goals of mass atrocity prevention. Second, restoring this agency to local populations goes some way towards healing the injustices of the past. While past efforts to build democracy may have been

driven by the strategic interests of the UK, a reparative approach fosters cooperation through which the task of reconciliation (moral repair) might be achieved. Finally, this reparative approach to democratisation would be beneficial for mass atrocity prevention efforts. This approach is more likely to be welcomed by populations and satisfy both the *reparative effectiveness* and *sustainability* principles – indeed, programmes which are built in part by local populations are more likely to endure in part because they are not perceived as an imposition. By championing this local ownership of prevention efforts, the legitimacy of mass atrocity prevention (and arguably the R2P) more generally is likely to be improved, increasing the probability of engagement with other efforts.

5.6. Conclusion

The potential for economic and other pacific methods of assistance to both advance mass atrocity prevention and to do justice to those who have inherited the unjust legacies of colonialism more than merits their inclusion in the UK's R-r2p. Humanitarian aid, already a well-established measure to respond to crises, is to be given extra emphasis under the R-r2p. Aid comes with fewer drawbacks than less peaceful means, such as those which employ force (regardless of whether it is offensive or defensive). While aid is unlikely to *stop* mass atrocities, it has significant potential to at least mitigate the heightened vulnerability survivors face in the aftermath of violence. The UK must, under the R-r2p, increase spending on humanitarian aid, especially in instances where atrocities can be linked to legacies of British colonial injustice. Humanitarian aid is not, on its own, sufficient to address

crises like mass atrocities – nor for that matter is it alone enough to rectify an injustice the scale of British colonialism.

Support for humanitarian aid, while necessary, is best thought of as a short-term solution to atrocities falling somewhere in the middle of the continuum between reaction and prevention. Following the cessation of crises, it is necessary to meet the responsibility to rebuild in a manner which reduces the likelihood of violence in the future. In pursuit of this goal, the UK must also commit wholeheartedly to root cause prevention by using its ill-gotten wealth in a redistributive manner, offering development assistance to former colonies and beyond in a cooperative manner. Such assistance might also serve to bolster democracy. Compared to military means, then, these measures can be more easily linked to the principle of reparation in that they can be understood as either a repayment of historically exploited wealth and resources or as an attempt to rectify the legacy of authoritarianism engendered by the British policy of divide and rule. As such, they provide a compensatory function. In both cases, prioritising local agency by empowering those traditionally understood as “recipients” of aid is essential in meeting the requirements of reparation. It is wise to link these measures under a wider reparative framework, both to emphasise the UK’s desire to atone and to mitigate the potential harms associated with pursuing any one measure in isolation (Easterly et al., 2006, p. 131).

Although there are of course always instances where immediate reaction will be needed to protect vulnerable populations from violence, it seems that the UK would be best making reparation through peaceful measures of mass atrocity prevention. Such measures come with few of the drawbacks associated with attempts to make reparation through coercive means and have the potential to allow a wider application of resources. By not committing a glut of resources to one

specific military conflict, the UK can use its resources and expertise to build resilience to mass atrocity crimes in a range of states. A commitment to reparation through pacific means also serves an important purpose in rehabilitating the UK and mass atrocity prevention, thereby simultaneously doing justice to victims, restoring trust in the UK, and increasing the legitimacy of atrocity prevention efforts.

Compared to violent or other militaristic measures, then, the suggestions made in this chapter are far less likely to reproduce colonial modes of domination, and are likely to on balance *meet the sustainability principle*. Even with these means of reparation, however, the UK and mass atrocity prevention still face challenges in international rehabilitation, as many of the legacies of colonialism continue to shape relations between the UK and its former colonies – between North and South. In order to understand how to address these legacies and rebuild the trust necessary for reparation, we must turn once more to Gallagher’s “radicals” (2022, p. 1021) and to the structural injustice that the UK has sustained even after the formal end of colonialism.

6. Diplomacy and Norm-Brokering: Towards an Inclusive Dialogue

Diplomacy is one of the most understudied and underinvested (UNGA, 2015, p. 10) means of atrocity prevention, perhaps in part because of the tendency of scholars to focus on its more controversial elements, as discussed in Chapter 4. Although, as Pattison notes, diplomacy has often been thought of as simply ‘standing by’ (2015, p. 936), measures under this banner might provide one of the most sustainable and versatile tools for the UK to make reparation through atrocity prevention. Such measures provide the necessary upstream complement to the measures discussed in Chapter 5, while largely avoiding the controversies of those in Chapter 4 (Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 355). Even criticism, perhaps the most confrontational diplomatic measure, is likely to be less normatively contentious than more coercive means. Spotlighting, understood as a measure which serves to draw attention to the crises experienced by vulnerable populations while amplifying their voices, is even less so. Likewise, in comparison to those measures discussed in the prior two chapters, diplomacy is likely to provide a relatively cost-effective option for agents whose diplomatic capacity is high (even if this should not be the primary basis on which R-r2p measures are determined). Diplomacy can thus run in parallel with the measures described in Chapters 4-5 as a more sustainable way to signal the atonement necessary for reparation. Indeed, although the direct preventive effect is likely to be modest, diplomacy has a high reparative potential since it is, at its core, concerned with relationships.

As established in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3 in particular), in order to make reparation, the UK is obligated to (re)build relations with those to whom it has done injustice which are characterised by mutual respect (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5) through a process of 'moral repair' (Walker, 2006a, p. 23). These relationships, while crucial to the process of reparation, are also essential to endeavours to prevent future mass atrocities. Trust, in particular, is vital to both processes. Trust underpins the effectiveness of mass atrocity prevention; without it, effectiveness is limited, since recipients of preventive aid are perhaps unlikely to willingly work with those providing it if they are perceived as lacking legitimacy. While measures such as economic assistance are likely to enhance the legitimacy of reparative efforts (McGary, 2010, p. 546; Satz, 2007, p. 185), diplomatic measures can make this act of atonement explicit in a way that facilitates trust. In other words, alongside the reparative measures identified in the previous chapters (especially the protection of refugees and economic assistance), it is diplomacy that provides the necessary words to support these deeds.

Given the relatively limited effectiveness of diplomatic measures to prevent atrocities in their own right (Bellamy, 2014, p. 34), this chapter argues that it is the extent to which they develop trust which partly determines their reparative potential. Trust is an essential parameter of these measures, alongside the guiding principles established in Chapter 3. This must be achieved not only through diplomatic measures such as spotlighting or criticism, but also through efforts to (re)build consensus around shared norms by reforming international discourse and practice in a way that empowers such states to feel that they have shared in how they are shaped. In doing this, the UK would go some way towards rectifying the injustice it has done to populations in its former colonies by addressing, at least in part, the coloniality of the international system that continues to constrain them (Bell, 2019, p. 3; Collste, 2015, p. 1). The outline of the chapter is as follows.

Following on from the previous chapters on tools, this chapter begins with the most immediate diplomatic measures to increase protection. In an exploration of the potential of diplomatic criticism and spotlighting crises, both will be discussed in regard to their ability to satisfy the guiding principles of the R-r2p *in their own right* (even if they might be combined). While diplomatic criticism is unlikely to merit emphasis under the R-r2p, spotlighting has the potential to provide satisfaction to those owed reparation, while also helping to draw attention to the suffering of the vulnerable without excessively reproducing a relationship characterised by colonial-era paternalism. This chapter understands diplomatic measures (especially criticism) as largely iterative: that is, they draw much of the effectiveness from an appeal to shared international norms, and in doing so repeat and highlight their meanings.

The chapter then turns to how expressions of a diplomatic commitment to protecting vulnerable populations from mass atrocity crimes also belong under the R-r2p framework. While this thesis is, as established in the introduction, more concerned with the UK's general "responsibility to protect" as distinct from the R2P, the persistence of the R2P even in spite of its flaws suggests that any criticism of states perpetrating mass atrocity crimes is likely to be linked with the norm. As such, the second half of this chapter is largely concerned with the reparative function of diplomatic efforts to strengthen, clarify, or reform the R2P norm "regime" (Orchard, 2020, p. 30) and its associated ideas in light of contestation. Accordingly, the chapter also provides brief clarification as to the need for mutually respectful applicatory contestation – that is, disagreement over how the norm is applied – lest its core validity come into doubt (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 152; Peak, 2025, p. 5). Having established this, the chapter then puts forward three possible ways in which the UK might aim to strengthen the norm through diplomacy. Each model's reparative potential is assessed against the guiding principles established in Chapter 3, as well as their ability to foster trust.

The first option put forward by this chapter is the “UK as Leader” model, which sees the UK demonstrating its commitment to the R2P and mass atrocity prevention largely as is, emphasising the version of the norm as reaffirmed in 2021 by the UNGA (UNGA, 2021b, p. 1) and by the UNSG in their yearly reports. While potentially helpful in some instances, this model is dismissed as being too likely to reproduce colonial relationships and to legitimise perceptions of the norm as inherently Western (Nili, 2011, p. 43; Pourmokhtari, 2013, p. 1785). Likewise, there is some doubt as to whether such leadership would consequently invite the suspicion of Global South states. The second option is referred to as the “UK as Abdicant” model, which sees the UK attempt to cede its leadership and role in shaping reform largely to states in the Global South. While acknowledging that the UK has spoken for such states for long enough and thereby demonstrating the humility necessary to make reparation, the UK is doing little under this model to divest itself of its prime diplomatic position gained in part from colonial-era exploitation, even if it is trying to eschew the responsibilities that come with it.

The final option provides a middle ground between these two models and is best understood as the “UK as Advocate” model. This model makes the case that the UK’s reparative responsibilities might be most effectively met by using its prime diplomatic position to foster an inclusive and cooperative dialogue between Global North and South. This model sees the UK not as a leader, but as fulfilling the role variously of a “broker” (Hamilton and Buyse, 2018, p. 205; Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 33), “sherpa” (Mabera and Spies, 2016, p. 220), or, as this chapter argues, an advocate.

6.1. “Diplomatic” Alternatives: Criticism and Spotlighting

Diplomatic measures of atrocity prevention serve as a potential “alternative” to other measures (Pattison, 2015, p. 936) in part because they are perceived as relatively inoffensive in contrast to the measures discussed in the prior chapters, especially those which are violent in nature (Wight and Cowper-Smith, 2022, p. 341). Indeed, diplomacy has been highlighted by the keenest advocates of the R2P as a possible route through which to ‘convince people of influence in situations where there is a threat of atrocities to refrain from committing crimes’ (Šimonović, 2020, p. 1). In this regard, diplomacy is understood as primarily consensual, as an attempt to appeal to the morality of would-be perpetrators rather than to address the structural factors permitting – and potentially driving – their actions. Dialogue alone, however, is unlikely to stop atrocities when interlocutors are committed to perpetrating atrocities. Indeed, though consensual dialogue has a high potential reparative function, it might best be thought of as a much further upstream means of atrocity prevention (as will be explored in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.3). The range of diplomatic measures should not only be thought of as entailing appeals to perpetrators, however; in fact, even diplomatic means of atrocity prevention can be coercive in nature. This section concerns the two measures of shaming and spotlighting as potential diplomatic measures through which the UK might pursue the R-r2p.

6.1.1. “Naming and Shaming”: Avoiding (neo)Colonial Paternalism

Diplomatic criticism (sometimes “shaming”) refers to a practice whereby the UK might publicly name and condemn actors that perpetrate mass atrocity crimes. This measure should be understood, in line with Pattison, as solely diplomatic, not

involving economic or military coercion (2015, p. 937). The purpose of shaming is, first, to challenge the legitimacy and authority of those who perpetrate mass atrocity crimes, in a way that results in a loss of reputation (Krain, 2012, pp. 585-6; Pattison, 2015, pp. 938-41). It also has the potential to deter actors from perpetrating at least the specific act they are being shamed for again (DeMeritt and Conrad, 2019, p. 129). While Krain has suggested that naming and shaming by various actors can 'have significant ameliorative effects on the severity of [even] the most extreme atrocities' (2012, p. 585), Gallagher suggests that the record of their effectiveness is in fact more mixed (2021, p. 1). While Zhou et al suggest that states are more effective in bringing about greater human rights progress than NGOs (2023, p. 451), it is perhaps the input of external states which is least likely to be welcomed. These assumptions are not incompatible, as even if the diplomatic interventions of states are unwelcome, this does not mean that they are ineffective. The criticism of states might be perceived to carry more weight than that of NGOs, since it can carry the threat of other sanctions (political, economic, or otherwise) or the promise of incentives should behaviour change, as a type of 'throtter' (Pattison, 2018, p. 161).

Rather than suggesting *all states* are bad "shamers", it might be more accurate to accept that it is *who* is doing the shaming and *how* it is being done that matters for its effectiveness (Gallagher, 2021, pp. 6-10). Given the potential for backlash (and potentially entrenched oppositional attitudes) to shaming from some actors (Snyder, 2020, pp. 644-5), it would be prudent to approach diplomatic criticism cautiously. In particular, Gallagher suggests that Western actors are unlikely to be the best "shamers" (2021, p. 10). While it is possible that this type of shaming is less controversial than that associated with human rights violations, the perceived Western bias of the R2P invites caution. This has particular relevance under the

UK's R-r2p, lest it reproduce the colonial-era "civilising mission". As such, it would be prudent for the UK to ensure that, in offering criticism of the perpetrators in its former colonies, it does so in a way which obtains "buy-in" from states which are perceived as more legitimate "shamers" (Gallagher, 2021, p. 11). This might mean explicitly drafting statements alongside regional partners or post-colonial states which are well-respected in order to more readily satisfy the *agency principle*. In reparative terms, *who* speaks and *with whom* they speak matters as much as *what* is said. Demonstrating the good international citizenship at the heart of the R-r2p also has the potential to make it less likely that the UK's criticism is not perceived as hypocritical.

Any act of criticism will also only be truly reparative (not merely a rebuke) when it acknowledges the structural contribution of British colonial injustice. Without the support of more "legitimate" partners, however, it might still be wise for the UK to avoid criticism as a primary means of atrocity prevention. Even if it seems instinctively moral to offer criticism, it has the potential to make pursuing other measures under the R-r2p difficult. Although diplomatic criticism could put pressure on those that perpetrate mass atrocity crimes (Pattison, 2018, p. 112), it also might pose an additional obstacle to dialogue between the perpetrator and the UK. When perpetrators believe that the UK is opposed to them – particularly in the context of state-led atrocity crimes – it might increase the difficulty in, for instance, gaining access to provide humanitarian aid (Savelsberg and Brehm, 2015, p. 598). Where risks to access are high, it would be prudent to avoid criticism unless paired with the mitigations discussed above.

Indeed, criticism might be challenged further on the basis that the British committed many mass atrocities itself in the process of colonialism. This type of

“hypocrisy objection” is limited, according to Pattison (2018, pp. 103-6), since he argues it would be better for states to engage in criticism and be hypocritical, than to merely stand by. In the context of the R-r2p, however, the hypocrisy objection has implications for how far the UK is able to foster trust. Even if criticism serves to draw attention to the plight of vulnerable groups, it fails to satisfy the *non-domination* and *sustainability* principles to an extent which mitigates its narrow satisfaction of the *reparative effectiveness principle*. In this light, it would be prudent for the UK to avoid pursuing overt criticism as its primary means of atrocity prevention, opting instead for means which are both more effective and more reparative, and which serve to restore trust in the state.

6.1.2. Spotlighting Crises: Championing the Vulnerable

Even if criticism is unlikely to achieve the cessation of atrocities (especially when offered by the UK), it also has the potential to highlight particular crises. When states shame other actors, they do so not only through private channels, but in the context of an international audience; as such, it has the potential to shape public opinion (Pattison, 2015, p. 938), ‘activate powerful bystanders’ (Krain, 2012, pp. 585-6), and more broadly draw attention to crises (DeMeritt and Conrad, 2019, p. 144; Gallagher, 2021, p. 5). This fulfils one of the core functions of diplomacy to ‘signal the attentiveness of the international community’ (Bellamy, 2015a, p. 31). While any form of diplomatic communication that highlights the crimes of perpetrators might be perceived as external interference, spotlighting (as with appeals) could at least be pursued without overt criticism. As such, spotlighting should be understood as a measure which highlights crises while amplifying the voices of the affected. Pursuing

spotlighting as a measure under the R-r2p offers three potential benefits: it provides satisfaction by recognising the harm done; it increases the likelihood that international actors will provide aid; and, instrumentally, it arguably makes other R-r2p measures easier to implement, as opposed to the limitations imposed as a consequence of criticism.

In spotlighting the crises occurring in its own former colonies in particular – though, given the relative frugality of this measure the UK also has multilateral and universal obligations here – the UK might do much to challenge the perception that states like itself care only about crises occurring in the Global North or where they have a vested interest. Scholars have long documented in particular the focus in Global North media coverage on such crises (Bachman and Brito Ruiz, 2024, p. 24; Porter and Evans, 2020, p. 327; Sobel et al., 2020, p. 170). This focus has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes about certain areas of the world (Sobel et al., 2020, p. 174), and is particularly relevant for mass atrocity crises occurring in post-colonial states. Indeed, there has been a documented tendency for media in the Global North to present an image of such states as typified by conflict, as both more common and more inevitable (Sobel et al., 2020, p. 170). Likewise, Porter and Evans suggest that even in the context of natural disasters, UK media coverage has a tendency to present the populations of the Global South in way that “others” them (2020, p. 327). This is likely to be even more pronounced in conflict and atrocity scenarios, where the potential for mass violence may be presented as alien. It is fair to argue, then, that press coverage of crises has implications for both how the public perceive them and, consequently, for how the state reacts to them (Sobel et al., 2020, p. 171).

While it is not as if the state exercises complete control over the media, Bachman and Ruiz suggest that there is a tendency in Global North states like the US for representation of conflicts to be shaped in part by the state, even if journalists aim for objectivity (2024, pp. 26-7). Indeed, as Savelsberg and Brehm emphasise, it is reasonable to assume that there is some overlap between how the state understands foreign affairs and how those reporting on it do (2015, pp. 598-9). It is also true that media corporations are likely to report on press releases or statements offered by the government which draw attention to crises. Under the R-r2p, the UK might thus be wise to draw attention to crises even without necessarily making criticism – though it must do so in a way that does not reproduce popular media stereotypes of populations in the Global South as inevitably drawn to violence. In this regard, spotlighting might even serve to challenge stereotypes which have their basis in colonial-era notions of colonial populations as “savage”. Spotlighting must also recognise the UK’s culpability and responsibility in part for present mass atrocities, as stemming from colonial-era harms. In doing so, recognition of crises occurring in its former colonies has the potential to provide satisfaction for past injustice. It also, in part, might serve to address the structural disadvantage at-risk populations in the Global South face in drawing the Global North’s attention to their plight, thereby going some way to satisfy the *agency principle*.

Spotlighting, as with criticism, also has the potential to increase the likelihood that international actors will help. While the behaviour of the state can affect the domestic coverage of mass atrocity crises in former colonies, the reach and extent of this coverage should not be understood as *solely* domestic. In an era of globalisation, more popular media organisations often have international reach. The UK in particular has a high potential for spotlighting effectiveness, given the scope

and reach of the BBC. The BBC World Service, for instance, is provided in 43 languages and operates globally. While it is not the case that the government dictates the reporting of media organisations operating within its borders, the BBC World Service in particular provides a route through which the state might communicate its desire to highlight vulnerable populations and its willingness to provide reparation to them, at least indirectly. The service remains a respected and trusted source of news while simultaneously serving a diplomatic purpose for the UK (Webb, 2024, p. 113). More adequate funding towards greater media capacity, both domestically and in a way that empowers voices in the Global South, has the potential to raise the visibility of mass atrocities (De Franco and Meyer, 2025, p. 318). This presents a pathway to greater global recognition of some of the groups made most vulnerable by the UK – especially where such groups lack political salience and are thus unlikely to receive assistance (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 103) – which might in turn ease the international mobilisation of mass atrocity response. In this way, spotlighting somewhat satisfies the *reparative effectiveness principle*.

More narrowly, spotlighting serves a purely instrumental purpose in that it has the potential to ease the implementation of the R-r2p's other measures by generating support domestically. As noted in Sections 3.2 and 4.5 (in particular), even assuming a commitment to making reparation is made by the state, it is possible that any measure pursued might be challenged by the wishes of the public. Ultimately, governments are beholden to the electorate even where reparative obligations exist, and convincing the public of the legitimacy of the R-r2p is likely to go far in ensuring its sustainability. Spotlighting can thus be understood as cyclical: UK governments can draw attention to crises which the press might then report, which in turn might

affect public opinion, thereby giving the state more capacity to respond to crises. Responding to crises more overtly likewise has the potential to provide a greater spotlight on the plight of vulnerable peoples. Spotlighting responsibility as more than solely humanitarian, as a reparative obligation if not a debt, might therefore ease the mobilisation of resources in pursuit of the R-r2p. Accordingly, spotlighting is more likely to serve a reparative function than outright criticism of perpetrators, providing a rationale for the UK to abstain from leading international shaming of misconduct in favour of those perceived as more legitimate. This spotlighting might be conducted in unison with dialogue with the perpetrators of mass atrocities, thereby applying limited pressure without overtly challenging the state (in cases where atrocities are state-led).

6.2. Norm Contestation: A Duty to Clarify

Both diplomatic criticism and spotlighting derive much of their potential effectiveness not only from drawing attention to the fact that perpetrators violate humanitarian values, but also that they violate established international norms. Even if these diplomatic means of atrocity prevention are unlikely to be effective in *ending* any crises, they serve to establish, highlight, and uphold norms. This is, according to Pattison, one of the key roles of criticism (2015, p. 940). These measures are therefore iterative – they repeat and highlight how things *ought* to be, thereby generating normative discussion. Because of this, the clarity of the shared norm that they invoke matters for its potential effectiveness. Without a clear appeal to trust in shared norms, the potential for backlash is likely to be higher. As such, clarification has the potential to increase the likelihood that the above measures meet the

sustainability principle. Clarity is likely to reduce suspicions of potential “mission creep” (as discussed in the previous two chapters) and thereby widen trust. Further to this, greater consensus around a shared norm of atrocity prevention is likely to make the action it mobilises easier. Despite the abundance of literature narrating its demise, this norm continues to be the R2P (as established in Chapter 1). Even if the R2P is perceived as toxic, it at least ‘provides a common framework and vocabulary for approaching atrocity crimes and discursively bounds the scope of morally permissible international conduct’ (Peak, 2025, p. 6). What is needed, however, is greater clarification and consensus as to its meaning.

The narrow focus of the R2P on the four mass atrocity crimes (based in a solidarist understanding of such crimes as the greatest violation) has arguably contributed to its enduring (if feeble) status. Indeed, the innate immorality of acts of mass atrocity can perhaps in part help to explain the R2P’s early adoption and ability to challenge traditional understandings of sovereignty, one of the most fundamental international norms. Quissell, for instance, explains that the ‘shorter the moral distance [between actors], the more likely persuasion or adaptations will occur, leading to the eventual adoption of a norm’ (2022, p. 1). This is not to say that the R2P has experienced a relatively linear adoption process – as this thesis has emphasised, the R2P faces many challenges, both in terms of perception and implementation. It would be unwise, however, to assume that norms ever develop with stability and linearity (Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 11; Kolmasova, 2023, p. 3; Labonte, 2016, p. 135; Russo, 2020, p. 225; Welsh, 2013, p. 380). Indeed, the internalisation of a norm can be challenged and possibly even reversed in the face of new contestation, as happened with the R2P in the aftermath of the 2011 Libyan intervention (Graubart, 2015, p. 201; Jacob, 2018, p. 391). Growing criticism of the

norm – and the actions that it legitimised – following this intervention signify norm erosion (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 152), even if opinion of the norm remains generally stable (Scherzinger, 2023, p. 91).

Crucially, perhaps because of the core morality of the R2P, its validity remains largely accepted (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 59), even if this consensus became more fragile in the years after the Libyan intervention (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 166; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 62). While this consensus has arguably become even more unstable amidst the end of the so-called “liberal international order” (Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 22; Lake, 2026, p. 11; Mahmud, 2026, pp. 12-13; Newman, 2020, p. 473), its core argument – that the international community must not stand by while mass atrocities are perpetrated – largely retains rhetorical support, even if it is not fully practised (Evans, 2024, p. 330; Gallagher, 2025, pp. 491-2; Jarvis, 2025, p. 1; Pattison, 2021, p. 891). Indeed, even if some states are willing to flout the norm given the persistence of the acts it proscribes, the core ideas of the norm continue to be employed within the UNSC and UNGA in many cases (with some key exceptions), and are spoken of positively by many states (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 168; GCR2P, 2026f; GCR2P, 2026g; Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 5; Rhoads and Welsh, 2019, p. 604; Scherzinger, 2023, p. 81). At the same time, however, how the norm is operationalised and implemented *is* contested (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 59; Hunt and Orchard, 2020, p. 8; Welsh, 2019, p. 53). This is referred to as applicatory contestation (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 59). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the challenge it poses to traditional understandings of state sovereignty. It is also, as a relatively abstract international agreement rather than an internationally binding law, particularly subject to debate and contestation (Serrano, 2010, p. 174; Welsh, 2013, p. 368). The norm has

essentially remained in flux since its genesis (Labonte, 2016, p. 134; Russo, 2020, p. 225).

Addressing this contestation has both implications for the effectiveness of atrocity prevention *and* for the reparative function of the UK's R-r2p. Applicatory contestation can ultimately be good, with many scholars highlighting how it helps to refine and clarify the duties demanded by the norm (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, p. 355; Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 149; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 51; Hofmann and Suthanthiraraj, 2019, p. 232). Indeed, since contestation helps to demonstrate that norms are not solely unidirectional, Peak describes it as a 'valuable collective good' (2025, p. 11). Even alternatives such as those proposed by China (Xiaoyu, 2012, pp. 341-2) and Brazil (Jacob, 2018, p. 400) have represented a healthy stage in the norm's development, since they have provided possible paths forward for the norm at a time when the conversation has stalled. Brazil's proposal, for instance, suggests possible alterations to the norm while accepting its core (Ribeiro et al., 2021, p. 227). In fact, so long as contestation does not take the form of 'disengaged rejection' (Maulana and Newman, 2022, p. 46), it should almost be encouraged. Such contestation might also explain how consensus around the core of the norm is said to have actually *increased* since Libya (Welsh, 2019, p. 53; Dunford, 2025, p. 611). Accordingly, the R-r2p should foster consensus not by blocking *applicatory* contestation, but by actively encouraging healthy and mutually respectful debate. This performs a reparative role since it helps to avoid unilateral interpretation of the norm, thereby satisfying the *non-domination* and *agency* principles.

The growing number of crises around the world might be understood as a sign that the norm needs abandoning, but the level of consensus around its core suggests instead that it needs *clarifying*, or perhaps even *reforming*. These crises

mark the failure of states to successfully build a consensus on how to operationalise the duties demanded under the R2P, but they also represent an opportunity to drive towards a new consensus. As Finnemore and Sikkink note, it is often ‘world historical events’ that drive the creation of new norms (1998, p. 909). Given the UK’s role in shaping the international order for its own benefit throughout the colonial era and beyond, it has a reparative obligation to ensure that these new (or perhaps *renewed*) norms do not once more ignore the wishes of the populations of the Global South in favour of the interests of the North.¹⁹ While the creation of the R2P certainly aimed to achieve this, its current toxicity (and perceived post-Libya Western bias) suggests that more must be done to ensure that consensus is established on a truly mutual basis rather than enforced from above, thereby contributing to the trust-building objective of moral repair. As such, consensus should not be pursued in a way which reinforces global coloniality (Dunford, 2017, p. 390). In achieving this, the UK must adopt a reparatively appropriate approach to its norm diplomacy.

6.3. “Leader”, “Abdicant”, “Advocate”: Three Models of Norm Diplomacy

The continued advancement of the R2P norm is not without its challenges. Beyond those discussed in the previous chapters is the lack of political commitment and will (Stensrud and Mennecke, 2024, p. 435; UNGA, 2025, p. 3). Although there

¹⁹ While, Dunford suggests that a decolonial approach to global ethics (and thus one the R-r2p is sensitive to) should not be ‘solely oriented towards consensus’ (2017, p. 390), this seems less relevant here. Indeed, consensus can still be pursued under Dunford’s argument, so long as it does not involve ‘the destruction of other life-worlds’ (2017, p. 390). Consensus around shared norms of atrocity prevention is hardly likely to do this, suggesting that achieving consensus is compatible with a decolonial approach.

still exist many resolutions invoking the R2P in various organs of the UN, others have noted that states are hesitant to use the language of the R2P when shaping their own actions (Evans, 2024, p. 328; Stensrud and Mennecke, 2024, p. 438; Welsh, 2019, p. 68). Indeed, an examination of recent UNSC resolutions invoking the R2P shows that R2P is often only invoked to remind states of their *own* responsibility under the first pillar of the norm, rather than calling for international action. While such invocations suggest some longevity to the norm, they also imply that there is once more a lack of political will to champion the norm (Stensrud and Mennecke, 2024, p. 438) in the face of the applicatory contestation that has accompanied the norm since the intervention in Libya. Without a demonstrated commitment to the norm beyond an abstract affirmation of its basic principles, contestation is likely to do more harm than good. Without states willing to advocate for its principles and maintain that the norm is workable, contestation is more likely to be condemning rather than constructive, and thereby unlikely to bear the fruit required to clarify the norm's function.

6.3.1. The “UK as Leader”: Steering the Conversation

If, then, championing of the norm has the potential to strengthen it – which in turn should help to increase the likelihood that it is operationalised – then it can be said that the UK has a reparative responsibility to do so. At first glance, the UK is in prime position to meet this responsibility. Indeed, the UK stands in good diplomatic stead given ‘its continuing centrality to global state networks’ (Shaw, 2011, p. 2438), regardless of its relative decline. Even today, in the aftermath of the UK's decision to leave the European Union, it continues to hold a position of power (Ralph et al.,

2020, p. 164). In particular, it is worth noting it is one of only five permanent members of the UNSC, as well as the privileged position it holds in less security-focused institutions and networks such as the IMF and the G7, an international political and economic grouping. In the case of the IMF, the UK holds the 6th largest voting share, whereas the G7 provides access to an exclusive forum through which some of the most powerful liberal states in the world can discuss how best to cooperate on issues of global importance. The UK's position in each of these groupings (among others) presents it with many opportunities in which to champion the case of the R2P.

It also stands to reason that the UK could be successful in doing so, given its reputation 'as one of the more consultative and trusted permanent members' of the United Nations Security Council (Gifkins et al., 2019, p. 1362). This is perhaps unsurprising, since, as Ralph et al. note, 'a state's capacity to "punch above its weight" diplomatically is linked to its material commitments' (2020, p. 164). While the authors suggest that the UK's material commitments to the UN are lacking (Ralph et al., 2020, p. 172), it is still true that its economic potential internationally is high. Indeed, if the UK were to meet the responsibilities of the rest of the R-r2p as laid out in this thesis, then its diplomatic potential is likely to be increased. The UK's relative decline in terms of hard power in fact makes it more likely that it will focus on diplomacy, as it necessitates building relationships via peaceful dialogue rather than demonstrations of strength. This decline could therefore even increase the trust that states have in the UK as a member of the P5, as it might be perceived as a more willing and far less abrasive actor than other members such as the US, China, or Russia. Indeed, the UK has in the past demonstrated a commitment to using its role for the good of atrocity prevention with its endorsement of the responsibility not to

veto (Vilmer, 2018, p. 340), alongside France. The UK, then, has the potential to not only champion and endorse the R2P in international debate, but to do so legitimately by also meeting the obligations demanded of adherence to the norm. Achieving this, however, requires some shifts in the UK's current approach.

Previously, the UK has affirmed its commitment to the R2P, though it has arguably not gone far enough in demonstrating this commitment. This is not to say that the UK has been a negligent adopter of the norm. In fact, the UK's then ambassador to the UN, Karen Pierce, emphasised the state's commitment to the norm in 2018 (UNA-UK, 2018). Others have noted the UK's willingness to take on the role of penholder for areas relating to the R2P (Gifkins, Jarvis, and Ralph, 2019, pp. 1356-7). Parliamentary reports in recent years have also acknowledged the need to develop a robust mass atrocity strategy (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2018, p. 3; International Development Committee, 2022, p. 3), as has been reaffirmed by the UK government's establishing of a Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub (International Development Committee, 2023, p. 3). While the government recognised the need 'to use its influence to advocate for strengthened mechanisms, greater cohesion and integration of the UN system, and investment in a system-wide approach' (International Development Committee, 2023, p. 2), it has not entirely met this goal. Although, for instance, the UK has invoked the R2P 31 times in UNSC statements between 1995 and 2019 – the 4th most – it has only done so in 0.7% of its total statements (Scherzinger, 2023, p. 88). This is much lower than other states such as Peru, Australia, or the Netherlands, who invoked the norm in 3.2%, 3.4%, and 2.6% respectively during their time as members of the Council (Scherzinger, 2023, p. 88).

Consolidation of atrocity prevention norms internationally does not seem, then, to be a priority of the UK. There is a need for norm entrepreneurs to 'spotlight

and create issues, interpret and dramatize information, and engage in cognitive framing that ideally will resonate with other policy elites' (Labonte, 2016, p. 137). As it stands, the UK has missed many opportunities to achieve this. The most recent Integrated Review in 2023 – the UK government's outline of its combined 'Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy' strategy (UK Government, 2023, p. 2) – makes no direct reference to either the R2P or the prevention of mass violence more broadly. This omission is reflected in its seeming unwillingness to spotlight issues and frame crises through the lens of the R2P. Recent statements in the UNGA's General Debates (Lammy, 2025) or in Special Sessions on Ukraine (Young, 2025) have included only implicit reference to atrocities, going without explicit demands that the international community meets its responsibility to protect. In making this omission, the UK is allowing the image of the R2P's demise to fester. The UK should, as a hypothetical champion, continue to mainstream the norm in all appropriate contexts.

The benefits of this approach are potentially high. It is possible that greater emphasis on the norm alone could help to strengthen it, or, at the very least, continue to remind the international community that it *does* have a responsibility to protect vulnerable populations from mass atrocity crimes. That being said, there are flaws to this model which make it far from the best approach to adopt under the guiding principles of the R-2p. First, emphasis and support alone cannot foster consensus. While these might go some way to reminding the international community of its responsibilities, it arguably fails to address the root of contestation at the heart of the R2P discourse in the years since Libya. Unilateral endorsement without engaging with the applicatory contestation risks leading to 'renewed arguments about both the norm's desirability and the norm's scope' (Welsh, 2013, p.

380). This is especially likely when the state endorsing the norm has not yet built up a sufficient degree of legitimacy and trust in the international community. Although the UK has a reputation as the most trusted out of the P5 (Gifkins, Jarvis and Ralph, 2019, pp. 1362), this does not necessarily mean that it is trusted completely; rather, it merely suggests that the UK is perceived as a more legitimate partner *compared to* the other permanent members of the Security Council.

This is perhaps unsurprising given that, as Acharya writes, 'powerful states do not make good norm entrepreneurs; [...] On the contrary, norms peddled by powerful states easily invite suspicion' (2015, p. 65). This suggests that the UK's support for the norm is far less likely to generate distrust than if other actors such as the US were to take charge. Even if this is the case, however, the UK is still arguably *too* powerful an actor to be entirely free of suspicion. In this sense, a more robust commitment to championing the norm in international discourse could potentially do more harm than good for the advancement of mass atrocity prevention. Indeed, given the perceived Western bias at the heart of many R2P critiques, it seems unwise for the UK to present itself as champion or leader too overtly or unilaterally. This is compounded by the UK's historical (and sometimes contemporary) preference for humanitarian intervention (Brockmeier et al., 2014, p. 432; Newman, 2021, pp. 633-4), the norm's controversial predecessor (Smith, 2016, p. 397). Likewise, the UK's attempts to link the R2P with regime change in its localisation of the norm are also likely to generate suspicion (Gilgan, 2021, p. 1457). If there is anxiety among the Global South about what 'Western humanitarian agendas may conceal' (Cater and Malone, 2016, p. 291), then the UK, as a state with a complicated history of humanitarianism, is unlikely to be the most prudent choice for

reducing contestation. In this sense, adopting this model is unlikely to satisfy the *sustainability principle*.

This model also fails in meeting the *non-domination principle*. While affirmations of the legitimacy of the R2P could potentially do much to strengthen the norm, this behaviour also runs the risk of assuming that norm socialisation is a one-way process (Xiaoyu, 2012, p. 344). As stated above, a reparative approach means clarifying *with*, not *for*, post-colonial actors. In other words, by championing the norm as it currently stands, the UK would risk discounting the perspectives of suspicious states in pursuit of a dogged adherence to an earlier “consensus”. Norms, of course, do not travel simply from one actor to another without question, but are continuously refined and strengthened through dialogue and contestation (UNGA, 2026, p. 3) – to assume otherwise risks doing more harm than good to the norm. Indeed, as Deitelhoff writes, if states do not feel that their anxieties and perspectives are heard, then it is possible that contestation might “radicalise” (2019, p. 152). Radicalisation entails a shift from applicatory contestation to validity contestation, that is, the legitimacy of the very core of the norm (Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 152). In this extreme scenario, the UK should not present itself as the norm’s main champion lest it taint even the fundamentals of the norm.

In this light, adoption of this model reproduces colonial modes of domination by echoing the “civilising” dynamic at the heart of the imperial agenda. Advocating for the strengthening of the norm from a position gained in part from colonial era exploitation, without consultation of the exploited states, demonstrates a lack of humility over its historic injustices. Rather than acknowledging that its privileged international position stems from injustice, adopting this model in the UK’s approach to normative advancement might be perceived as a continuation of colonial-era

sanctimony – a belief that it is exceptional and therefore deserves to steer the development of international norms. Such a perception would risk not only reproducing coloniality in contemporary relationships, but also the legitimacy of the norm itself. In this sense, although such leadership is perhaps in some ways the model that the UK is most likely to accept, it is also the least ideal option. While such an approach could be mitigated by at least attempting to speak *for* rather than *over*, and by meeting the other obligations of the R-r2p set out earlier in this thesis, it seems that it would for the most part be unwise for the UK to take on an overt leadership role in clarifying the R2P. As such, it is necessary to consider the merits of a model that cedes responsibility to other states.

6.3.2. The UK as Abdicant: Ceding Rights, Ceding Responsibility

If contestation over how the R2P is invoked and applied is largely coming from states in the Global South in opposition to states in the Global North, then attempts to strengthen the norm must be sensitive to this dynamic. Indeed, Levinger suggests actors in such states can play a vital role in consolidating the norm (2024, p. 205). Under this relationship, it makes less sense to blindly reaffirm the contested norm than it does to give credence to those who would contest and reform it. In order to achieve this, it might be more reparative for the UK not to assume a leadership role, but rather to cede its role in shaping the norm. In ceding its right to dictate international norms, the UK might adopt a humbler and more penitent approach to diplomacy and thereby go some way in achieving the atonement necessary for reparation. At the very least, yielding its right to lead the shaping of the rules and norms of international order is likely to help rebalance international order, even if

only slightly. Indeed, to relinquish such a right would represent a symbolic victory for many states in the Global South who have understandably been trying to reshape the structures of the international system since the end of the colonial period (Braveboy-Wagner, 2024, p. 227). It would also help the international system to more accurately reflect the growing power shift away from the Global North (Braveboy-Wagner, 2024, p. 227), as well as the fact that it is often these states who are often operationalising the norm at a regional level, even if not internationally (Chandler, 2016, p. 47). Allowing Global South states to shape the norm as they desire would also do much to mitigate its perceived Western bias.

At first glance, then, it seems as if this model is the most appropriate means of making reparation, as it privileges the return of agency to those so often denied it in the past. This model, however, is not without its flaws. First is the problem that there is no real guarantee that any state in the Global South will take up the mantle of reworking and subsequently championing the R2P. Even though Global South states have played a key role in shaping the R2P (Dunford, 2025, p. 622), driving consensus is a weightier task. Such a responsibility is not small, and states are perhaps unlikely to rework a norm that might be perceived as having only tangential benefit to them (Kenkel and Stefan, 2016, p. 50). It is possible that by ceding its right to champion the R2P, the UK's absence would not be filled by agents from the Global South but either by other Western states, or, as is more likely, by no one. Under this model, it is possible that applicatory contestation would continue with little change or momentum to address and reform the flaws of the norm. Attempts to contest and champion reformed versions of the R2P have in the past been quickly abandoned, as with Brazil and its alternative "Responsibility While Protecting" (RWP) norm (Kenkel and Stefan, 2016, p. 50).

Even if states in the Global South *do* take up the mantle of responsibility, there is also no guarantee that proposals to reform the R2P will be effective. Effectively reshaping norms requires ‘structural power’, that is: ‘the capacity of an actor to impact (determine, change, inhibit, etc.) significantly the *terms of interaction* in the international system’ (Spies, 2018). This structural power might also be termed diplomatic potential or capacity, meaning the ability of a state to effectively achieve its aims via diplomacy. Expecting states in the Global South to automatically have the same level of diplomatic capacity would be unwise given the historic disadvantages many such states continue to face. Spies, for instance, argues that diplomatic capacity is one of the dividing lines of the international system:

Less developed states are disproportionately vulnerable to the outcomes of multilateral processes, yet their enthusiasm about the practical and symbolic value of multilateral diplomacy is not matched by the capacity to participate on equal terms

(Spies, 2018)

In other words, for the most part, it is Western states that have a higher diplomatic capacity to affect norms than those in the Global South do. For instance, Smith notes that even South Africa, a state that has at various times played a key role in championing the R2P (2016b, p. 391), has often become overextended in its attempts to pursue multiple foreign policy agendas (2016a, p. 125). As such, the resources needed to achieve *consensus* might not be easily accessed.

Likewise, states in the Global South largely face an institutional deficit – that is, they lack the privileged position that states such as the UK hold. Of particular relevance is the UK’s permanent position on the Security Council. While there are of

course ten elected positions on the UNSC which run for a term of two years, advocating for any agenda adopted during the term becomes difficult following its cessation. Indeed, this was one of the reasons provided by Brazilian diplomats for the state dropping support for the RWP after the end of its term, since it was 'no longer in a position to have its voice heard as loudly or to influence how matters related to international peace and security are shaped normatively' (Kenkel and Stefan, 2016, p. 50). This gives rise to another potential problem of the Abdicant model: it is possible that the most powerful states in the Global South might simply dominate the conversation instead. As Stuenkel notes in his analysis of the capacity of emerging powers to set international agendas, 'performance is highly uneven' (2016, p. 111). If permanent membership of the Security Council allows for agendas to be more consistently supported, then it seems likely that states such as China have the potential to dominate the reframing of the R2P in the absence of Western norm leaders. While this may be a step in the right direction away from Western states dominating key debates, there is arguably little more value to this than if the UK were to champion the norm, unless such powerful states demonstrated that they were championing a view inclusive of the perspectives of smaller states. If this is not evidenced, however, then it seems likely that agency is still denied, only that it is a different state doing the denying.

Although abdicating one's leadership position to give way to the Global South might seem instinctively reparative, the flaws of this model discussed above suggest rather that it simply allows the UK to absolve itself of responsibility. Rather than empowering its former colonies – and states in the Global South more generally – to have *their* say over how best to reform the R2P, this model would result in the UK divesting itself of its obligations without effectively enabling such states to succeed.

In other words, the problems associated with the advancement of the R2P agenda are likely to persist because under this model states in the Global South are left to solve them without the resources of states like the UK. The restoration of agency to its former colonies is a red herring, then: through this model the UK would be justifying stepping back from rectifying any of the injustice it has perpetrated in the name of humility. While the approach outlined in this model might not reproduce colonial modes of domination, thereby avoiding the objection made to the prior model, it is not necessarily more successful in satisfying the other guiding principles. Centrally, the duty is unlikely to do much to rectify the UK's historic exploitation of its former colonies as it does nothing to address how it continues to benefit from such exploitation.

Indeed, as explained previously, part of the UK's R-r2p is based in its *capacity* to bring about change since this capacity is in part a legacy of its Empire, its position on the P5 in particular. Its diplomatic capacity might also be located in this exploitation, since such capacity can be partially explained by an understanding of the system it helped to build (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2). Likewise, the UK is able to commit more to diplomacy than developing states since it has more resources to spare, in part due to its earlier colonial-supported development. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the UK, like many Western powers, continues to be far ahead of other states in regard to setting international agendas (Stuenkel, 2016, p. 118). The flaws of this model might be at least mitigated by not *entirely* abdicating responsibility. This could entail lending some support to Global South agents even if mostly remaining absent, through methods such as affirming the need to support the Global South, or through acknowledgements of the unjust coloniality of current international structures. While going some way to ameliorate the model's flaws,

however, such measures arguably do not go far enough in empowering its former colonies.

In the current international order, this model of the UK as Abdicant risks allowing the UK to avoid the cost of reparation. Indeed, empire is said to have been particularly influential in developing international law (Bell, 2019, p. 3; Mignolo, 2024, p. 483), the global economy (Collste, 2015, p. 1; Hutchings, 2010, p. 123), and the unequal distributions that are central to international hierarchy (McCarthy, 2009, p. 4; Rotmann et al., 2014, p. 371). The full cost of reparation for colonialism might require that the UK helps to reform these global structures (Táíwò, 2022, p. 1), possibly even going as far as giving up its seat on the P5 and all other unjustly gained benefits – this is, according to Shelton, ‘the real cost of full reparations’ (2012, p. 97).²⁰ At the very least, it might require the UK to advocate for more equitable representation within the permanent membership of the UNSC. Such reforms might make this model possible but are both unlikely to happen any time soon and are beyond the responsibilities included within the remit of the R-r2p. As stated previously, the R-r2p must remain pragmatically narrow – the purpose of this thesis is not to make the case that a new approach to atrocity prevention could be the full scope of reparation, but to ask how reparation might inform the UK’s approach to atrocity prevention (see Section 3.3). It is necessary, then, to find the most ideal solution to this non-ideal scenario. In order to do so, the UK must find a middle-ground between the two models.

²⁰ Though it stands to reason that giving up its seat on the P5 would also represent an example of abdication of responsibility, unless this privilege is returned in some way to those whose exploitation made it possible. The challenges in deciding to *whom* the seat should be granted are, however, not at all simple.

6.3.3. The UK as Advocate: A Middle Ground

The prior two models, whatever their potential benefits, exhibit many flaws which suggest caution in blindly adopting them. As explained above, the first model might be challenged on the basis that it does little to challenge the perceived Western bias giving rise to much of the contestation of the norm. Following the approach laid out by this model would arguably limit the extent to which the UK could demonstrate atonement as part of its reparative process, and reproduce relationships tinged by coloniality. As such, it would be prudent for the UK to, if not eschew a leadership role entirely, then at least to adopt an approach marked by ‘a more humble and even a more repentant global politics’ (Glanville, 2021, p. 173). Such an approach would go far in advancing the R2P norm (Glanville, 2021, p. 173). The second model is not without its flaws either. Centrally, in relinquishing its right to shape norms, this model shifts responsibility away from Western states like the UK entirely onto states who do not necessarily have the capacity to reshape it.

While there are merits to the argument that diplomatic efforts might achieve what Western states have failed to do, as well as that the system has been shaped by the West for long enough, such a model permits an absolution of the UK’s reparative responsibilities. A middle ground is needed. Such a middle ground is likely to entail a way through which the UK might use its ill-gotten position to make good on its history of exploitation while also avoiding leading from above. This might involve, as Pattison advocates, actively listening to the concerns and views of rising powers (2021, p. 901). This requires the UK to become an advocate for the Global South, a broker (Hamilton and Buyse, 2018, p. 205; Thakur and Weiss, 2009, p. 33), and a sherpa (Mabera and Spies, 2016, p. 220).

Contestation is, as many have emphasised, often good for the long-term health of norms (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, p. 355; Deitelhoff, 2019, p. 149; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020, p. 51; Hofmann and Suthanthiraraj, 2019, p. 232). As much as the *type* of contestation matters (validity vs applicatory), so does the *method* of contestation. When actors feel that their perspectives go unheard in the development of shared norms, such norms are likely to experience what Acharya terms 'circulation' (2015, p. 73). Such circulation means that norms are essentially always being refined in international debate by a variety of actors, which in turn has the potential to strengthen them (Acharya, 2015, p. 76). This understanding is perhaps more accurate as it emphasises 'a two-way process of socialisation' (Xiaoyu, 2012, p. 344). While such circulation means, according to Acharya, that norms might forever 'remain essentially contested' (2015, p. 77), the potential benefits of circulation largely outweigh the harms. Indeed, the R2P, as with many norms, is far more likely to succeed if its continued advancement is truly collaborative (Acharya, 2013, p. 468; Acharya, 2015, p. 60). This matters not only because collaboration is more respectful, but also because building support for the norm may depend on emphasising its 'non-Western bases', especially amidst the end of the liberal international order (Pattison, 2021, p. 901). Achieving this, however, is no small task, and requires concerted efforts to develop relationships shaped by mutual respect. While it is perhaps possible for the UK to achieve this as a leader or norm 'entrepreneur' (Hofmann and Suthanthiraraj, 2019, p. 228), it is likely to have more success in instead adopting the role of a 'broker' (Hamilton and Buyse, 2018, p. 205).

Norm entrepreneurs, as explained above, are actors who aim to frame norms in new ways that help to make their implementation possible (Hofmann and

Suthanthiraraj, 2019, p. 228; Labonte, 2016, p. 137). Such a role often assumes some degree of leadership, however, and is largely synonymous with being a norm “champion”. Compared to entrepreneurs, the potential of norm-brokering as a diplomatic approach lies in its emphasis on deliberation. Indeed, brokering involves a process whereby actors ‘assimilate or discount alternative normative standpoints’ (Hamilton and Buyse, 2018, p. 207). Actors might adopt an even *more* deliberative approach whereby all perspectives are given weight in discussion, allowing the assimilation or dismissal of alternative views to be the product of collective agreement. While powerful states might generate suspicion when leading from above, there is no reason to necessarily believe that such states cannot be brokers. So long as inclusivity is fostered and explicitly advocated for, it might even be the case that the diplomatic capacity of a state makes other states *more likely* to engage with them. Even if other states, for instance, disagree with what it perceives the UK’s perspective to be, such states might want to engage with the UK *because* its position makes it a potentially powerful partner.

In practice, brokering conveniently aligns with the reparative process, since both necessitate (re)establishing ‘relations characterized by equality, reciprocity, and respect’ (Collste, 2015, pp. 84-5). As emphasised at the beginning of this chapter (and in Chapter 3), many scholars have named this as the most important element of reparation (Hamber, 2007, p. 265; Satz, 2007, p. 185; von Platz and Reidy, 2006, p. 361; Walker, 2006a, p. 213; Wenar, 2006, p. 403). Under these new relationships, brokering empowers the largely post-colonial states of the Global South with the ‘equal opportunity to shape (and reshape) the forms of power and government acting on them’ (Iverson, 2002, p. 1). Given the need to be non-exclusionary, it is worth questioning how this ought to be done. Since the UK owes a particular reparative

debt to its own former colonies, it might seem that the UK should privilege the viewpoints of those to whom it has done the most injustice historically. Another perspective might hold that the UK should do the most to consult not only the states to whom it owes the most, but also those who lack effective diplomatic capacity in the current international system. Such an approach is flawed, however, in that it assumes alternate normative perspectives are automatically valid purely since those states which hold them have experienced prior injustice. As such, it might make more sense for the UK to construct relations characterised by respect more broadly in its *multilateral* approach to brokering, while focusing on its own former colonies in *bilateral* contexts.

While a commitment to multilateral diplomacy is likely to be the best way to go about brokering norms, the question of which international forum is the most appropriate remains. Given the global scope of the UN, Thakur and Weiss have argued that it is the only body through which normative consensus can arise (2009, p. 24). This seems to make intuitive sense for a number of reasons: the norm was first advanced through the UN, the UNGA has the greatest reach of any international institution, and the body has well-established mechanisms for debate. However, there are reasons why the UK might want to attempt norm-brokering through other international bodies. First, attempts at further brokering through the UN might be unwise given that the norm's advancement seems to have largely stalled in the body thus far. Attempts to further broker through this forum could muddy the waters and risk only reproducing the current contested discourse. Second, even if membership of the UNGA is equal, some of the UN's other organs, such as the Security Council, are not – they are inherently hierarchical. As such, even seemingly open discussion in the UNGA might be tainted. While the UK should of course still work within the

confines of the UN given its other strengths, it is also worth acknowledging that the UK might benefit from brokering norms through less structured bodies, including those which are fundamentally deliberative like the Commonwealth (Anyaoku, 2011, p. 505; Wilhelm, 2015, p. 451).

Unlike the UN, the Commonwealth has been named as an international body whose survival is dependent on its ability to form consensus (Mayall, 1998, p. 385). In fact, states which have no historical link to the UK have cited this as a justification for joining. Johnstone, for instance, found in interviews with Rwandan government elites that the primacy of harmony as an organising principle of the Commonwealth was one of the main draws for Rwanda to seek membership (2019, p. 316). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the institution has been praised for its ability to build consensus (Anyaoku, 2011, p. 505; Wilhelm, 2015, p. 451). Given this potential, the Commonwealth might provide one route through which the UK can foster an inclusive debate over the R2P norm. The relative informality of the Commonwealth, while a flaw in most matters of governance, is potentially beneficial here – for both the advancement of the norm and also for states which are being consulted. Indeed, speaking to Chatham House, Foreign Ministers for Togo and Ghana explained their decision to join the Commonwealth despite having no historical links on the basis that there are benefits in doing so (Amare et al., 2022). Likewise, the Foreign Minister for Gabon stated that the openness of the institution compared to other bodies was a key draw (Amare et al., 2022). Mayall similarly notes the potential that ‘membership can provide governments with diplomatic and political support’ (1998, p. 380).

While the Commonwealth may provide an opportunity for norm-brokering, it is worth noting that it is not without its flaws, though some are overstated. First, the

body of course has explicit links to the British Empire. As such, it seems axiomatic that trying to work through the institution risks reproducing a colonial relationship, especially as there is a perception among some that the Commonwealth is merely a continuation of the British Empire (Jackson, 2013, p. 99). While there may have been some merit to this initially, the UK has not led the institution since 1965 (Mayall, 1998, p. 379), even if the British monarch problematically remains the figurehead of the institution. Regardless, as stated above, states with no historical link to the UK have sought to join despite this neo-colonial perception, even though it is purely voluntary and arguably provides few tangible benefits. It is probably more accurate to say that the Commonwealth continues to exist in spite of the British rather than because of it (Mole, 2022, pp. 1-2; Shaw, 2008, p. 24).

A second flaw is that, even with a growing membership beyond those to whom it owes bilateral obligations (as outlined in Chapter 3), there are only 56 members of the Commonwealth as opposed to 193 of the UNGA. If the goal is to construct a truly pluralist and inclusive discourse, then there are limits to how far deliberation can go in the Commonwealth. Conversely, however, the Commonwealth provides an excellent opportunity for the UK to consult directly with those who suffered colonial exploitation at its hands (though some states, such as Myanmar, are not members). The Commonwealth should not be thought of as the sole focus of the UK, but it does at least provide one possible avenue through which to broker the R2P norm. Through deliberation, the UK might begin to generate a more equitable, Global-South-influenced consensus, for which it might advocate.

If a norm broker focuses on generating effective deliberation, then a norm 'sherpa' (Mabera and Spies, 2016, p. 220) is concerned with the ensuing processes necessary to generate a global accord. A sherpa first and foremost has to 'lead by

example and socialize other states into the values and norms of international society' (Mabera and Spies, 2016, p. 220). Such leadership does not necessarily entail the pursuit of one's own agenda or presenting oneself as morally superior. Instead, a sherpa might be an actor which seeks to promote the circulation of norms. In this instance, as a norm sherpa, the UK might seek to advocate on behalf of Global South states, supporting and conveying perspectives gained through the deliberative processes discussed above to other actors. While some criticism may be made that the UK is once again assuming a leadership role as objected to under this chapter's first model, there are good reasons why leadership here might be necessary. Centrally, the current framework of the international system means that there is likely to be some structural limit to how far the UK can entirely avoid a leadership role for the foreseeable future. This might be mitigated by ensuring co-ownership/leadership with Global South states in diplomatic forums. So long as concerted efforts are made to present itself as merely an advocate (or even an emissary) and not as a shaper in its own right, such objections might be mitigated.

Sherpas, according to Mabera and Spies, are often the middle powers of the world (2016, p. 220). While there may be a perception that great powers are likely to always be self-interested, the UK's relative decline in recent years might actually strengthen its potential as a broker. The UK, as stated above, continues to hold a privileged position in the international system even with its decline, as evidenced by its permanent seat on the Security Council. Perhaps *because* of its decline, though, the UK must justify why it deserves to continue to hold onto its seat. Brokering is one way through which the UK might do this, as it allows the state to present itself as the voice for multilateralism and dialogue among the permanent members. Whereas Brazil abandoned the RWP once its membership ended, there is no time limit on the

UK's advocacy. Likewise, its position in relatively "exclusive" channels such as the G7 allows the UK to advocate for Global South perspectives in forums the region is largely denied access to. Even in bilateral dealings with other Western powers, it stands to reason that the UK might employ its relationships for the purpose of advocacy. Permitting the UK to hold on to some of its unjustly gained benefits so long as they are used to fulfil its reparative responsibilities seems, therefore, the most pragmatic option. Ultimately, it is this third model that offers the highest reparative potential in the current international system.

6.4. Conclusion

Diplomacy is a versatile tool through which the UK might meet the demands of the R-r2p. Given the costs – morally, economically, and politically – that other methods of atrocity prevention incur, diplomacy is comparatively sustainable. Indeed, diplomacy does not merely entail 'standing by' (Pattison, 2015, p. 936), but provides a potentially effective means of highlighting mass atrocity crises, even if such measures are unlikely to ever directly *prevent* them. Compared to other measures, spotlighting in particular has the potential to make reparation while simultaneously avoiding the objections raised by the guiding principles of this thesis. A particular strength of this (and criticism, albeit to a lesser extent) is its ability to highlight the violation of internationally affirmed norms. Diplomacy, as this chapter has made clear, offers potential benefits for the strengthening of such norms (Pattison, 2018, p. 96). In this sense, diplomatic measures are essential in advancing norms of atrocity prevention more generally. Indeed, the trajectory of the R2P has emphasised the essential role that diplomacy plays in the protection of vulnerable populations.

Although recent years might have seen a decline in overt support for the norm, the R2P has persisted and in some senses consensus has even deepened. The norm has in past years experienced applicatory contestation rather than validity contestation, primarily over its perceived Western bias in scenarios where the norm has been invoked. While the extent of this “Western bias” claim is at times overstated, the perception itself continues to shape attempts to reduce contestation.

While diplomatic criticism might serve an iterative purpose, in that it serves to repeat the importance of international norms, it does not, on its own, reduce contestation. As this chapter has made clear, diplomacy under the R-r2p must go further to reduce this contestation by empowering those states which currently feel that their anxieties and perspectives are unheard. Without a reduction in this contestation, action to support vulnerable populations is unlikely to be carried out due to a lack of political will to operationalise a potentially toxic norm. The scope of reparation under the R-r2p therefore demands that the UK help to reduce this contestation, especially since it is in part due to suspicions of neo-coloniality. In healing the injustices of colonialism, the UK must make certain that states do not fear a repeat of the past. In this light, this chapter considered three possible models of diplomatic behaviour through which the UK might go about reducing contestation. Ultimately, although the first two models (the “UK as Leader” and the “UK as Abdicant”) may have some merits, the “UK as Advocate” model is likely to have the highest reparative potential.

Diplomacy under this advocacy model must have an overt reparative function. The UK’s colonial past demands a responsibility to act in ways that repair injustices rather than reproduce them. By explicitly eschewing a desire to shape the world in its image and fostering inclusive dialogue with a wide range of actors, including

populations in its former colonies, the UK can begin to build trust not only in itself as a reformed “international citizen”, but also in the legitimacy of the R2P itself. In adopting this approach, the UK would also make reparation by beginning to give states in the Global South the opportunity to shape the international structures that they have largely long been denied (Ivison, 2002, p. 1). In this sense, diplomacy is reparative thrice over: it can directly protect populations from harm, it can repair the fractured legitimacy of international norms such as the R2P (thereby increasing the likelihood that measures will be implemented to protect vulnerable populations), and it can go some way in restoring agency to actors that were historically disempowered by the UK. It is this final outcome that is perhaps most relevant to the R-r2p, since it serves to redress both the historic denial of agency to the UK’s colonially-subjugated populations and the contemporary denial that they experience due to unfair international structures.

Importantly, however, diplomacy should not be understood as a measure to pursue in isolation: the UK must pursue the full scope of the R-r2p so that each aspect strengthens the effectiveness of the others. It is only then that the R-r2p might truly begin to heal the injustices of colonialism.

7. Conclusion

This thesis began by highlighting the deeply troubling situation faced by the Rohingya population both in and outside Myanmar. Over the course of writing this thesis, the situation in Myanmar has continued to deteriorate (Mishra, 2026), while powerful states on the UNSC have failed to deliver the protection they have a duty to provide (UN, 1945, p. 7; UNGA, 2005a, p. 30).²¹ At the same time, this crisis has illustrated how mass atrocities are often constructed as the sole responsibility of the state in question, rather than having any relation to the harms brought about by external actors, especially its former coloniser. When research for this thesis began almost four years ago, it was informed by the tensions between the UK government's institutional amnesia towards the injustices committed in the name of its Empire (Saunders, 2020, p. 1160), all while drawing on imperial imaginaries through notions of a "Global Britain" (Gildea, 2019, p. 236; Langan, 2024, p. 2). This thesis has suggested that this is untenable – that for the state to employ the imagery of Empire to bolster claims about its influence without acknowledging the harms it engendered is morally wrong, especially when those harms have helped to give rise to contemporary mass atrocity crimes. On this basis, it has asked what responsibility the UK ought to have for mass atrocities perpetrated in its former colonies long after independence, advancing a new model termed the Reparative responsibility to protect (R-r2p).

This final concluding chapter draws the thesis' main arguments and contributions together, and provides clarification as to how the R-r2p might be both

²¹ The last (and only) UNSC Resolution expressing concern about the crisis in Myanmar was adopted in 2022 (UNSC, 2022).

ideally sequenced and practically applied. As such, this chapter begins by answering each of the thesis' research questions. It then assesses whether there is a "minimally viable" R-r2p, by which reparation might be made while acknowledging the need for UK governments to consider domestic appetites for doing so. Following this, the chapter proposes future avenues for research, before finally discussing its implications for greater and more just atrocity prevention.

7.1. Main Arguments: A Sound Basis for Responsibility

This thesis has sought to resolve the following research puzzle: Western states – here, the UK in particular – are in part responsible for the structural precarity that gives rise to mass atrocities and have the capacity for protection, while simultaneously being the least likely to be perceived as legitimate by affected communities and post-colonial states. It is necessary to address this puzzle given the duty-specification problem, whereby actors evade their responsibility to protect when duties are diffused across a range of actors (Hjorthen and Duus-Otterström, 2016, p. 187). Accordingly, this thesis asked the following central research question:

RQ1: Does reparation for colonial injustice offer a sound basis for attributing a special responsibility to protect to the UK?

This thesis has argued that reparation for colonial injustice *does* offer a sound basis for the allocation of a special responsibility to the UK, on a hybrid basis. Whereas systems of allocation are often either primarily backward-looking (for example, based on blame) or forward-looking (for example, based on likelihood of effectiveness or capacity), the R-r2p framework theorised in this thesis is grounded in a responsibility which is both. The UK has a special responsibility not only because its colonial

injustice has contributed to an enduring structural precarity in post-colonial states, but also because its remedial capacity in part stems from said injustice. Thus, it is morally *defensible* to allocate the UK a heightened responsibility to protect on this basis, thereby mitigating the duty-specification problem.

At the same time, whether this basis is “sound” relies also on how far it addresses the legitimacy gap at the heart of the UK’s protection efforts (and mass atrocity prevention more broadly). This thesis has argued that it is through invocation of the principle of reparation that this challenge might be mitigated. Acknowledging responsibility for the injustices it has perpetrated might do much to provide satisfaction (in the reparative sense) and alleviate the distrust Global South states have towards the UK’s humanitarian intentions. In other words, explicit statements of responsibility are a crucial condition for the legitimacy of the UK’s actions. These statements must be supported by measures which provide ample compensation, respect agency, and do not reproduce colonial modes of domination. RQ1 can thus be answered in the affirmative. The remainder of this section specifies the grounds, scope, and content of the R-r2p by answering the remaining research questions (RQs 2-5), thereby determining the extent to which reparation for colonial injustice provides a sound basis for special responsibility.

7.1.1. What’s the Harm?

This thesis’ second research question was:

RQ2: Why and in what ways was British colonialism unjust?

Centrally, British colonial rule was unjust because it denied agency to the populations it administered, opting instead for a mode of administration that can only

be referred to as the practice of domination. While proponents of empire would often try to justify its actions in the name of well-meaning paternalism, Chapter 2 demonstrated that such a justification has little merit in light of its practices and consequences. Indeed, the British ruled through mechanisms which served *not* the best interests of the populations they dominated, but instead produced enduring interdependent legacies in three regards. First, economic exploitation and misdevelopment has reduced the barriers to conflict between groups and has weakened state capacity for the prevention of mass atrocity violence. Through the creation of artificial borders and the construction and reification of politicised identity categories, imperial rule also lowered barriers to contemporary identity-based violence. Lastly, in generating intergroup tensions, the British left behind authoritarian institutions and systems of governance oriented not towards self-rule but towards cementing control. Colonial injustice, then, was unjust in ways that shape the responsibilities that are demanded under the R-r2p.

Each of these mechanisms has resulted in legacies which are not merely historical, but enduring. As Section 3.2 argued, colonialism is best understood as a historical-structural injustice: a wrong reproduced over time through enduring structures of domination and deprivation (Nuti, 2019, p. 160). This is sustained through persistent global coloniality and institutional inequalities in the international order, which has also served to sustain the benefits gained *by* the UK. Crucially, this has implications for the UK's capacity to fulfil the R-r2p. Because this injustice persists, so too does the responsibility to provide reparation. Moreover, because these injustices resulted in legacies not only in the UK's former colonies, but also beyond them, it is also necessary to clarify how far these reparative responsibilities extend.

7.1.2. A Responsibility *to Whom*?

As stated in Chapter 3, a special responsibility typically comes with much higher demands and costs than a general responsibility. As such, the second half of Chapter 3 sought an answer to the following research question:

RQ3: Does the UK's unjust history of colonialism imbue a special responsibility to protect populations globally, to those in post-colonial states, or only to those in its former colonies?

These obligations can be understood as universal, multilateral, and bilateral respectively (Achiume, 2019, p. 1561). Under the R-r2p, all of these duties *can* arise but are understood as falling along a spectrum of responsibility, with bilateral as the most important and universal as not stemming from reparation, but as arising out of the heightened need to demonstrate good international citizenship *after* injustice. First and foremost, the UK must meet its bilateral responsibilities. These links – those directly between the UK and its former colonies – must be prioritised since it is here that the connection is strongest: colonial harm has contributed to enduring vulnerability. Likewise, reparation is primarily relational, and so it makes sense for the UK to prioritise making reparation to those whom it has most directly harmed. It is also in these bilateral connections that the spectre of (neo)colonialism is most likely to be invoked (as a reproduction of colonial-era relationships), so it is here that the UK must be most sensitive to non-domination and rebuilding relationships characterised by humility and inclusivity.

Following on from this, the UK's duties extend multilaterally to other post-colonial states disadvantaged by the international system that the state helped to

create. As emphasised in Section 3.4, the injustice enacted by the British Empire was not entirely idiosyncratic; rather, it operated as part of an international architecture that permitted the conquest of those understood as “subaltern” by the “civilised”. In answering the previous research question (RQ2), this thesis emphasised that this architecture did not disappear, but instead continues to benefit states like the UK and to disadvantage those states still under the domination of global coloniality. Therefore, the obligation to make reparation extends beyond the bilateral on a multilateral basis, to these states also. Centrally, these duties are not universal (though arguably there is a moral basis to building a fairer world regardless), but merely *less* directly reparative than bilateral duties. Universal duties, on the other hand, are understood by this thesis as largely conditional, or as indirectly met in the pursuit of those which are bilateral or multilateral. These conditional duties should be pursued only where the UK has residual capacity after meeting its prior obligations and where doing so does not undermine the discharge of bilateral and multilateral duties: the R-r2p must be *sustainable*. Alternatively, some bilateral/multilateral obligations might also indirectly serve universal ends (such as the reshaping of norms). These duties should be understood as having broad importance for demonstrating atonement *generally* (as good international citizenship), rather than making up for injustice to those harmed. This sequencing of responsibilities sets the parameters for what responsibilities the R-r2p generates (RQ4) and how they should best be pursued (RQ5).

7.1.3. The Demands of the R-r2p

Having established first that duties exist, and to whom they are owed, the second part of this thesis sought to provide an understanding as to what these duties *are* by asking the following research question:

RQ4: What responsibilities does the R-r2p generate?

In broad terms, this thesis argued that the R-r2p generates many of those responsibilities typically understood as falling within the atrocity prevention toolkit and beyond. These tools can be broadly defined (following the structure of each chapter) according to where they fall on a spectrum of response, from the most downstream to furthest upstream. Accordingly, the R-r2p generates the following: immediate protection responsibilities; preventive responsibilities; and diplomatic responsibilities. These measures were the focus of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 respectively. Since these responsibilities stem from injustice, they have *reparative grounding* (a guiding principle of the R-r2p established in Section 3.5). Reparation demands not only positive duties but *negative* duties – that is, what *not to do*. As a reparative minimum, any measure pursued as part of the R-r2p should not compound or reproduce colonial harm. As such, the R-r2p generates responsibilities which are likely to offer compensation and satisfaction (in reparative terms), in pursuit of non-repetition.

Immediate protection is often a necessity in mass atrocity scenarios, and yet is often controversial (given its links to military intervention). This thesis has argued that immediate protection might be provided through various measures, including the protection of refugees (and, concurrently, more generous asylum policies), safe zones, and humanitarian aid. These duties are, as above, first owed bilaterally.

Alongside these measures, the R-r2p generates a responsibility to prevent, which can be understood as providing broad material and symbolic compensation. These responsibilities include rebuilding after atrocities, development assistance, and capacity-building more broadly. Lastly, the R-r2p generates a responsibility to foster a more inclusive dialogue, especially in regard to the development of a normative consensus around mass atrocity prevention (centrally, around the R-r2p, as argued in Chapter 6). While colonial injustice does generate duties beyond this, this thesis has argued that the R-r2p itself must remain pragmatically narrow, focused primarily on atrocity prevention and measures where such prevention is the main intent. As such, the R-r2p does not include a broader duty to “remake the world” (see: Táíwò, 2023, p. 3), even if this is a moral imperative of colonial reparation in the wider context. The R-r2p, as a non-ideal framework, operates on the understanding that resources are limited. Accordingly, the following section addresses how the R-r2p *should* be operationalised.

7.1.4. Sequencing Reparative Protection

While the previous research questions helped to establish the grounds, scope, and possible content of the R-r2p, RQ5 helps to determine which duties are best prioritised under the framework. The final research question is as follows:

RQ5: How can the UK best meet its R-r2p?

While the answers to RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 can largely be understood as falling within specific chapters, RQ5 requires synthesising this thesis as a whole. This thesis has advanced the claim that action under the R-r2p should be guided by the following five principles, as established in Section 3.5: *reparative grounding*; *non-*

domination; agency; reparative effectiveness; and sustainability. While the *non-domination* and *agency* principles are of paramount importance, they are not absolute in the face of imminent risk. Ideally, though, the measures which best meet the demands of the R-r2p, and thus have the highest reparative potential, are those which satisfy *all* of these principles. These principles translate the earlier analytical claims of Chapters 2 and 3 into the evaluative criteria necessary to address this thesis' research puzzle. In achieving this and alleviating the legitimacy gap, satisfaction of these principles contributes to the task of moral repair (see Section 3.3) – that is, the (re)building of relationships characterised by mutual trust and respect. In pursuit of this end, this thesis advances the claim that the UK can best meet its R-r2p largely through a sequenced approach to reparative protection (even if some of these measures might be pursued simultaneously).

Where the second part of this thesis proceeds from immediate protection to prevention to diplomacy for analytical clarity, the sequencing proposed here is *inverse*. Since the task of moral repair aims to reconcile the harmed and the harmer, it is first necessary to demonstrate this through the provision of satisfaction. Satisfaction typically includes apologies, memorialisation, and – more broadly – demonstrations of guilt and atonement. The diplomatic measures outlined in Chapter 6, especially the “UK as Advocate” model, would arguably do much to achieve this. This type of diplomacy should be understood as both humble and inclusive (Glanville, 2021, p. 173), with the intention of (re)building trust both in the UK as a legitimate actor in humanitarian protection and in the norms of humanitarian protection themselves. This most upstream of measures provides first the visible acknowledgement of harm that serves to mitigate distrust of the UK's intentions and actions, thereby increasing the *sustainability* of other R-r2p measures.

Following this, the UK should then pursue measures which provide compensation for colonial injustice, thus giving the R-r2p's reparative efforts even greater legitimacy (McGary, 2010, p. 546; Satz, 2007, p. 185). Centrally, the UK should pursue the types of humanitarian aid, development assistance, and capacity-building that ensure both *agency* and *non-domination*. Such measures serve to signal that the state understands its responsibilities as including the reallocation of unjustly extracted wealth in prevention-relevant forms, while also demonstrating a willingness to do more than make reparation only *rhetorically*. This thesis also argues that these forms of compensation alone might imply that the UK understands its responsibilities as external to itself – as if the state has no culpability – and as such it must adopt a more generous and comprehensive approach to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers domestically also. Crucially, this should include the willingness to grant asylum more widely and to facilitate movement for those less able to reach the UK to *claim* asylum.

A robust approach to each of these measures, as well as a willingness to build relations characterised by respect and inclusivity, serves an important rehabilitative process which may, over time, widen the set of measures that are perceived as legitimate in exceptional circumstances. This thesis has argued that military intervention may be necessary in some non-ideal scenarios, but that such measures are *unsustainable* given the current state of norms of atrocity prevention. In other words, the UK should prioritise the former measures in pursuit of effective reparation, so that one day it may be trusted even where it is necessary to consider coercive measures. On this basis, reparation provides a sound basis for allocating a special responsibility to protect to the UK because it responds to enduring structural harm, allows for a principled sequencing (at least ideally) that is sensitive to the

legitimacy gap, and addresses the duty-specification problem. While this type of responsibility is thus normatively appealing, this thesis acknowledges that it is perhaps morally *ambitious*. This raises the non-ideal question of feasibility: how far, and in what adapted form, might the R-r2p plausibly be adopted under constraints of the “national interest” as conventionally understood.

7.2. Feasibility and Likelihood: Practical Adaptations of the R-r2p

Although this thesis has operated under non-ideal assumptions, uptake of its normative recommendations may be further constrained in practice. While it has advanced reasonable moral justifications for adopting the R-r2p, and suggested that demonstrating good international citizenship *is* in the UK’s national interest, this alone might not provide sufficient motivation for the state to do so. Indeed, it is possible that UK governments would face domestic opposition if they were perceived as devoting a substantial proportion of public resources *outside* the state. While the reputation of the Empire has changed somewhat over the past decade (see Chapter 3), there is a distinction between no longer exhibiting pride and feeling shame. Polling has shown, for instance, that only 21% of Britons believe the Empire is something to be ashamed of, while even fewer think former colonies suffered more than they benefited from colonial rule (Smith, 2025). As such, many of the UK’s citizens may understand colonialism as a thing of the past. Given the current cost of living crisis and many other challenges facing those living in the UK, many might query why they should suffer for someone else’s sins. This invites potential backlash. When far-right parties that preach a nativist denial of international responsibilities are

growing in popularity (POLITICO, 2026), adoption of the R-r2p as delineated by the thesis comes with electoral risks; as such, it is likely to be unsustainable.

This is not exactly a limitation of the thesis given its primarily normative nature, but it does call for at least a brief consideration of its practical relevance. Why, then, ought the UK to adopt (at least in part) an approach to atrocity prevention based in reparation for colonial injustice? Centrally, although the primary goal of reparation is of course ‘to do justice to victims’ (De Greiff, 2006, p. 455), the UK stands to benefit too. In pursuing moral repair, the UK is likely to establish relationships with other states and populations through which it can cooperate on other issues. Establishing trust serves, here, a key strategic function. Crucially, this might mean easier collaboration on security challenges that stand to make the UK *safer*. Respectful relationships might also lead to closer partnerships, which in turn could bring about mutually beneficial agreements, for instance, in the form of trade policies. While these pragmatic considerations do not *ground* the R-r2p, they do offer a route through which reparative duties might become politically adoptable and sustainable, albeit with some constraints.²²

These potential benefits are given additional weight in an era of transitional international order. In the aftermath of the UK’s decision to leave the EU, the state has found itself increasingly reliant on other partners, such as the US. At the same time, the UK has signalled a desire to “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific region, forging relationships with historic allies like Australia and New Zealand (both former colonies) while attempting to balance China’s growing regional hegemony (Curtis

²² Of course, as explained previously, political actors in powerful states like the UK have a responsibility to overcome these feasibility constraints (Gilabert, 2017, p. 122; Glanville and Pattison, 2024, p. 159). The reparative principle guiding the R-r2p gives this ‘dynamic duty’ (Gilabert, 2017, p. 122) even further weight. The following section, however, concerns how action under the R-r2p might be motivated under non-ideal conditions until these constraints can be lessened.

and Brooke-Holland, 2025, p. 5). More broadly, both Conservative and Labour governments have acknowledged the need to accommodate and cooperate with growing powers in the Global South such as Nigeria, South Africa, and India (Labour Party, 2024, pp. 124-5; Lammy, 2023, p. 36; Lammy, 2024; UK Government, 2021, pp. 61-3; UK Government, 2023) – all of which are former British colonies. These states are emblematic of the shifting dynamics in international relations (Ikenberry, 2024, pp. 121-2). Demonstrating a willingness to atone for colonial harm and to acknowledge its role in precipitating the atrocity crises facing many post-colonial states today might do much to rehabilitate relations. These links have become even more important currently given strained relations with the US.²³ In this light, making reparation serves the UK *instrumentally*, enhancing its reputation (Collste, 2015, p. 5) and potentially providing at least a small material benefit. It is worth stating once more that this should not be the primary driver of reparative efforts and cannot provide a *moral* justification for action, but one might question how far this matters if both “sides” stand to benefit. The potential for mutual benefit might in fact increase the R-r2p’s political feasibility, and thus the probability that it will be adopted. The purpose of reparation should not be punitive, but to bring about a more just world.

The process of making reparation should not be so low-cost, however, that the UK stands to gain more from it than those to whom reparation is owed. Which measures of the R-r2p, then, should the UK adopt? It might be that the best actions are those which are comparatively politically and economically sustainable while providing a high degree of legitimacy. As such, returning to (at least) the 0.7%

²³ At the time of writing, President Donald Trump is waging an ill-advised war in Iran and criticising the UK (and other NATO allies) for refusing to join him. Commentators have suggested that the UK and the US’ relationship, at least while the Republican Party holds the Presidency, is ‘beyond repair’ (Mason, 2026).

baseline for ODA (as briefly discussed in Section 3.4) and exhibiting a willingness to accept and, importantly, integrate (IRC, 2023, p. 2) asylum seekers might be pursued. Both of these might evoke the ire of those sceptical of reparative efforts, but both can also be framed as a necessary responsibility. A greater willingness to work *with* post-colonial partners (especially on a bilateral basis) might also serve this end – as such, demonstrating at least a willingness to atone for the past, or admitting historical (if not contemporary) complicity in the crises occurring across the UK’s former colonies should be pursued. Most importantly, the UK should adopt a new approach to diplomacy that is very similar, if not identical, to the Advocate model advanced by this thesis. The costs of diplomacy are comparatively low, and have the potential to do much to signal both atonement and acknowledgement of a shifting world. These three measures can be understood as the minimum required for a viable (but constrained) R-r2p, if not the normative ideal as outlined in Section 7.1.4. Having established the practical potential of the R-r2p, the following section turns to wider implications of this thesis and potential avenues for future research.

7.3. Implications and Future Research

This thesis has largely advanced a special responsibility based in reparation for colonial injustice *for the UK*. This does not mean, however, that the UK is the only state that ought to bear responsibility to address its colonial harms. Indeed, as stated at various points throughout this thesis, the British Empire is not entirely unique in its conduct, its crimes, or its consequences. Whether the British Empire was “better” or “worse” is largely irrelevant; comparative moral ranking adds little for injustices of this scale. The R-r2p framework, as it stands, is largely tailored towards providing

reparation for British colonial injustice, but other Western European empires employed similar mechanisms of rule. As such, while some work must be done to modify the framework to reflect variation, post-colonial ties, and contemporary capacity, this approach to atrocity prevention might also be adopted by other former Western European colonial powers such as – most pertinently – France. As stated previously, France also holds a permanent seat on the P5 and thus is in a similar position to the UK to use the benefits it gained from colonial extraction for the good of atrocity prevention. Because of its seat, this reparative duty to protect is heightened. In pursuit of a more representative application, further research might thus ask: how can the R-r2p be translated for a French context? Alongside this, efforts to come to a greater understanding of how the R-r2p can be operationalised by the UK – moving beyond theory to an analysis of its practical applications in specific contexts – offer an additional possible research direction.

More broadly, this thesis has implications for the role of reparation in foreign policy. This thesis has advanced the relatively narrow proposal of the R-r2p, and has refrained from offering a comprehensive account of what colonial injustice demands. Though others have offered proposals for this (see, for example: Collste, 2015; Lu, 2017; Táíwò, 2022), none have specifically done so in the context of a state's foreign policy. This offers a possible agenda for further work. Centrally, it is worth asking how the UK might adopt a foreign policy which serves to demonstrate penitence for colonialism, thereby contributing to the task of moral repair. On this basis, one might consider the relationship between not only reparation and atonement, but *redemption*. Bachleitner's work on how expressions of guilt for historical injustice as a type of foreign policy serve to redeem the image of the state in the international community is of particular relevance here (Bachleitner, 2019; Bachleitner, 2021).

Future research might thus wish to further query what benefits the state making reparation might gain in ontological terms; that is, in regard to its national identity. It is also worth investigating whether a reparative foreign policy aligns with the notion of a decolonial foreign policy, and what this is likely to entail. Previous work by Barkawi and Brighton on the role of post-colonial politics and grand strategy in the UK provides a useful starting point for this work (2013, p. 1109).

This thesis has several important implications for a more credible and legitimate protection of those populations that are at risk of atrocity crimes as a result, in part, of colonial injustice. The effects of adopting the R-r2p would not be immediate: the sequencing of the framework proposed by this thesis is a long and costly endeavour that requires concerted efforts to rectify past wrongs. In demonstrating a commitment to reparation by adopting an approach guided by humility, however, the UK might do much to mitigate the legitimacy challenges faced by atrocity prevention. In safeguarding agency and non-domination, the UK might increase the likelihood that its measures are perceived not as self-interested, but as truly reparative. By adopting the R-r2p, it is possible to move closer towards a world where those at risk of atrocities in post-colonial states suffer less the consequences of colonial injustice. It is to this end that the R-r2p operates, and it is to this end that atrocity prevention must move in pursuit of a safer, fairer world.

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