Introduction to Special Issue

Alternative Perspectives on African Peacekeeping

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This Special Issue of the *Journal of International Peacekeeping* aims to explore the conceptual periphery of multidimensional peacekeeping by shedding light on some of the concepts, activities or actors that are understudied or tangential to peacekeeping as usually understood or analysed. This is done through the African prism, as Africa has been the main laboratory of peacekeeping operations over the last two decades.

Africa hosts most of the United Nations (UN)-led peacekeeping operations,¹ and it is also a continent that can benefit from the involvement of its own regional and sub-regional organizations – be it the African Union (AU) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – with over the last years operations ranging from the AU-led AMIS I and II in Darfur and the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the AU Mission in

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Somalia (AMISOM) or the more recent African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). In the meantime, African conflicts and missions have provided the grounds for all recent peacekeeping-related conceptual and normative developments, from the issue of protection of civilians to that of robust peacekeeping or, in the margin, the concept of the responsibility to protect (RtoP).

Against this backdrop, peacekeeping has become overstretched as an activity and as a concept. Contemporary peacekeeping is defined simultaneously by a certain number of key principles such as impartiality, consent and non-resort to force and by recent developments that pertain to the evolution of state sovereignty, the concept of intervention or the use of force in international relations. While the key principles remain the bedrock of UN-led peacekeeping operations – as reasserted in the 2000 Brahimi Report and the 2008 Principles and Guidelines – operations have also become more intrusive, multidimensional and often coercive, thus broadening their scope but also questioning their conceptual coherence.

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As a consequence, peacekeeping reflects a tension between what it is at its core and how it has evolved since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, as peacekeeping becomes increasingly diverse and multidimensional, questions arise as to the type of activities that fall within the broad notion of peacekeeping, the type of actors that are involved, as well as the type of issues that need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of contemporary peacekeeping.

As an example, peacekeeping is theoretically conceptually distinct from peace enforcement in the sense that the use of force in peacekeeping is confined to a consent-based activity that furthermore takes place at the tactical level. But in the meantime, operations such as the AU-led AMISOM in Somalia or the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan – where the use of force is a central dimension of the operation – raise the question of where they stand on the crisis management spectrum. Similarly, although peacekeeping and peacebuilding are supposed to take place with the express consent of the host state, peace operations have been confronted with an increasing resistance from the host authorities that has undermined the notion of consent and shaped the nature of operations in a different manner.9 Likewise, the notions of hybrid peace or local ownership have lately started to put the emphasis on the role of local actors in peacebuilding, whereas a more top down state-centric approach had largely prevailed beforehand.10

In this context, the issue of peacekeeping in Africa has been the object of a growing literature that predominantly deals with the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the way the UN and African regional and sub-regional organizations respond to the evolving security challenges on the African continent.11 In most cases,

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peacekeeping is approached as a primarily state-centric and military activity that is analysed in debates on national policies, institutional responses and their coordination, capacity development and challenges, and the degree of effectiveness and legitimacy of the wide variety of actors and operations. In the African context, where the conflict management needs are immense, these debates relate to the ability of traditional security actors such as states and international organizations to respond to these needs. How capable are the UN, the AU or ECOWAS to run multidimensional peace operations in terms of political will and back up of their member states, operational capacities of the institutions and financial autonomy?

By default more than by design, these various debates define the contours of a certain conception of peacekeeping, in the sense that they put the emphasis on certain issues or actors rather than on others.

In contrast, this Special Issue examines these contours of multidimensional peacekeeping by looking at some of the concepts, activities or actors that are peripheral to the core peacekeeping issues or debates or that contribute to the conceptual and operational overstretch of peacekeeping. Issues being discussed include: whether host state consent is still a key principle of contemporary peace operations and, if yes, how it has shaped current operations; the extent to which RtoP has pervaded the field of peacekeeping and with what consequences for both activities; whether AMISOM is part of the broader peacekeeping spectrum; what is to be expected from some actors of peacekeeping in Africa, such as China, Brazil or non-state actors that play an important yet still peripheral or under-researched role; the scope of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in African peacekeeping operations and how it affects the legitimacy of current operations; and the impact of HIV/AIDS and its securitization on the mandates and operational capacities of African peace operations.

These various issues may be peripheral in the literature or in practice, yet they shape African peace operations to a large extent or may do so increasingly in the coming years, and therefore deserve to be analysed in parallel with other more central issues. How do these issues impact African peacekeeping and contribute to its conceptual evolution? To what extent do the new actors provide alternative thinking to mainstream peacekeeping policies? Overall, to what extent is contemporary African peacekeeping shaped by the tension between on the one hand its central albeit stretched tenets and on the other hand centrifugal or peripheral forces? Here are some of the questions that this Special Issue seeks to address.
To start, Denis Tull looks at how host state consent or the lack thereof have become an issue in many African peacekeeping missions, and asks whether this is so because African governments have become more assertive and sovereignty-minded or whether this comes as a reaction to ever more intrusive and longer operations. Tull draws on the two cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, which are similar in the sense that in both cases, a weakening consent has resulted from diverging views on the *raison d’être* of the UN mission.

Thierry Tardy explores the relationship between the Responsibility to protect and the protection of civilians in African peacekeeping operations. Through issue-linkage, the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations has often been presented as a way to operationalize RtoP – as illustrated in Darfur and Côte d’Ivoire. However, Tardy warns against the rapprochement, among other reasons, because the contentious nature of the two concepts, in particular the coercive dimension of RtoP, is such that issue-linkage is likely to exacerbate norms’ resistance rather than provide a mutually-reinforcing environment.

Although central to the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is peripheral to peacekeeping in the sense that it is not *per se* a peacekeeping operation. Paul Williams looks at how specific the mission has been, by analyzing seven strategic challenges. Interestingly enough, while the regional context and the AMISOM mandate and capacities initially did not bode well for a successful mission, Williams concludes that the operation to an extent overcame its strategic challenges to achieve its mandate to protect Somalia’s transitional institutions and facilitate the birth of a new sovereign government. Beyond the AMISOM case and what it says about an emerging AU strategic culture, this informs the debate on the merits of coercion in military operations at a time when robust peacekeeping is largely debated in UN circles, in the context of the Mali AU and UN operations in particular.

Fourth, the Special Issue offers two pieces on national policies, looking at China (Chin-Hao Huang) and Brazil (Kai Michael Kenkel) as examples of newcomers on the African continent. If those two countries are both attached to the centrality of the peacekeeping principles and in particular the sovereignty of the operation’s host state, they also have broadly accepted the recent evolutions towards multidimensionality, to the extent they have been socialized through peacekeeping. What yet remains to be seen is how these two countries will shape the way peacekeeping, and peacebuilding in
the case of Brazil, are being further developed on the African continent, and therefore become less peripheral and more central.

Local dynamics are then examined by John Karlsrud and Diana Felix da Costa, who draw on field research in South Sudan to revisit the issue of agency within peacekeeping operations. They argue that local peacebuilding outcomes depend as much on negotiations, bargains and compromises between different actors at the ‘field’ level, as on institutional policy decision-making deriving from headquarters. By doing so, they challenge the conventional wisdom by which a ‘dominant peacebuilding culture’ has precluded the contextualization of peacebuilding to local dynamics. Instead, important efforts seem to be made to contextualise peacebuilding activities to local circumstances.

The role of actors of contemporary peacekeeping is further elaborated by Abu Bakarr Bah, who looks at three kinds of civil non-state actors – international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based NGOs, and ad hoc community organizations – and shows how critical they are in any peacekeeping or peacebuilding policies. Drawing on the cases of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire, Bah acknowledges the difficulty to establish typologies of non-state actors and therefore to make generalizations about their roles. Yet he examines how these groups’ own agendas have led them to contribute to the implementation of peacekeeping/peacebuilding mandates, furthermore in a complementary way to state actors.

Julia Bleckner then looks at the issue of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (SEA) in post-conflict environments as one issue that is still overlooked and yet impacts directly on the legitimacy and therefore effectiveness of peace operations. The piece offers an analysis of gender mainstreaming and the integration of women in UN peacekeeping, and puts forward a series of recommendations on a broad-spectrum gender mainstreaming approach to conflict mitigation. However, the paper also insists on the fact that such effort can only be a component of a larger pivot towards recognition of the interrelated nature of gender inequality and sexual violence in conflict.

Finally, Ayodele Akenroye examines an issue that has remained peripheral and yet is of key importance for the future of African societies as well as peace operations; that is how HIV/AIDS has impacted African security institutions and as a result compromised the ability of African countries to effectively contribute to peace operations. Unsurprisingly, the issue of prevention comes as an indispensable policy response, from the main international institutions such as the UN and the AU, but also from non-governmental entities and local actors.
Overall, the analysis of the complexity of African peacekeeping requires that beyond the traditional issues, scholarship also pays attention to the more peripheral themes or actors as those are equally part of the politics and sociology of peacekeeping. If Africa has become the laboratory of multidimensional peacekeeping and reflects the evolution of state sovereignty, intervention, and human security, then all these dimensions must feed into academic and policy research. This does not mean that the concept of peacekeeping should be further diluted; on the contrary, one would hope that a better understanding of what peacekeeping can be expected to do will result from a better awareness of its contours, likely evolutions, and possible sources of conceptual erosion or operational irrelevance.