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Civilian protection in Africa: How the protection of civilians is being militarized by African policymakers and diplomats

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Abstract
This article explores how the protection of civilians is being militarized by African policymakers and diplomats. I draw on practice approaches to analyze what social groups are doing when they claim to "protect civilians." I show how innovative protection mechanisms can be seen as a function of officials and diplomats coping with the changing circumstances of increasingly militarized politics in Africa. Specifically, accountability mechanisms for unintended and intended civilian harm by African security operations have originated in connection with this development. I argue that these are results of anchoring practices which means that everyday informal interactions in one context become linked to another context. I argue that these emerging accountability mechanisms represent a new combination of practices, with the potential of changing the routine activities and mutual learning between policymakers and diplomats.

Keywords protection of civilians, African security, practice approaches, militarization

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Note on the contributor (max 150 words)

Linnéa Gelot is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Global Studies, Gothenburg University, Sweden, and a Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Sweden. Her primary field of expertise is the relationship between Africa and the UN on peace and security issues, especially concerning Africa-led peace operations. Research interests also include regionalization, critical security studies, and norms implementation. Her latest publication (co-edited with Cedric de Coning and John Karlsrud) is *The Future of African Peace Operations: From Janjaweed to Boko Haram* (London: Zed books, 2016). She is currently leading the project "AU Waging Peace? Explaining the Militarization of the African Peace and Security Architecture," in which the concept of militarization and security practice theory are employed to theorize militarizing institutional discourses and practices.

African security culture seems to be at a crossroads. On the one hand, observers of African security have identified human security, or ethical security, as a core component of its security culture since the establishment of the African Union (AU) in 2002 (Williams, 2007; Gelot & Tieku, in press; Jeng, 2012). This discourse includes a strong emphasis on civilian protection, which has become a cornerstone of international engagement (Gordon, 2013; Bradley, 2016; Willmot et al., 2016).

On the other hand, we are experiencing an increase in militarism (Stavrianakis & Selby, 2012). Against the backdrop of the "global war on terrorism" scholars have identified the militarization of the relations between the United States and Africa (Forte, 2012) through the U.S. military's expansion of "stability operations" to address state fragility in Africa (Bachmann, 2014). Similarly, the Western "reengagement" in United Nations (UN) peace operations, and Western support for the AU-led missions, increasingly includes a strong counter-terrorism component (Mateja, 2015; Karlsrud, 2016; de Coning 2017).

At the same time, several African leaders have advanced militarist narratives, whereby security threats in Africa – particularly armed Islamist groups – demand stabilization efforts and a "joint fight" by African and international partners (Project Syndicate, 2016). The readiness of Africa's own peace and security institutions to lead on counter-terrorism and stabilization interventions is given top priority. The steady rise in defense spending in many African states also accompanies this development (Perlo-Freeman & Solmirano, 2014).

The aim of this article is to increase our understanding of how the protection of civilians is being militarized by the AU's peace and security policymakers and its member states. It does this by conceiving of protection of civilians in Africa as a "site of practice" (Bueger 2015; Neumann 2013; Schatzki 2005). The practice approach is useful because I want to focus on what social groups are doing when they claim to "protect civilians," and their own understanding of it, at a specific time and in a specific place (Bicchi & Bremberg, 2016, p. 394). Bicchi and Bremberg (2016) explain that the practice approach helps bring into sharper focus the unfolding processes that we want to select, name, and frame (p. 394).

For the purpose of this article, I focus on major actors in the field of the protection of civilians located in and around the AU in Addis Ababa. I trace the activities of these actors in regard to an emerging protection practice: accountability mechanisms for civilian harm by African security operations. To gain an in-depth insight into these practices, I have conducted private conversations and semi-structured interviews with senior officials and diplomats in Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, in April 2013 and in April 2016. I have also carried out interviews with officials in the UNSOM political and human rights sections in Mogadishu, Somalia, November 2016.

I argue that zooming in on the micro-stories of protection practice can tell us something about the bigger picture of protection in Africa. Activities to create accountability mechanisms to minimize civilian harm embody at once militarizing and demilitarizing actors, interests, and values. I propose that this could be further understood by drawing

on a "sociological" institutionalist approach to militarization. I situate practices to protect in a context of heightened militarization. By zooming in on how actors anchor the aim of accountability to the rationale of offensive military operations I contribute to a discussion of militarization and demilitarization processes in the everyday practices of the site. Thereby, I hope to provide further insights about how policymakers and security providers strike balances between civil and military demands – not in judging whether militarization is "bad."

Militarization and security practice approaches

To understand how the protection of civilians is being militarized in Africa's contemporary security practices, I draw on the practice approach. To contextualize the site of practice in question, I complement the analysis with the concept of militarization.

The concept of a "site of practice" (Bueger, 2015; Neumann, 2013; Schatzki, 2005) is useful because it combines an inductive sociological approach to policy processes with analytical methods to zoom in on specific social groups, processes, or sets of actions, located in time and space (Bicchi & Bremberg, 2016). The definition of security practices can be admittedly quite broad, and here I want to use, "socially meaningful patterns of action" (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 4). Yet the analysis should be precise, which in my case means departing from what actors are doing to establish accountability mechanisms for civilian harm connected to African field operations, from 2007 onwards, at headquarter and at field level.

What emerges is a "sociological" account of regular and patterned protection activities. Contrary to conventional international relations approaches, the practice approach plays up *the importance of everyday and informal interaction*, the shared repertoires of interaction (know-how), the practical knowledge that it produces, and routine activities as well as mutual learning (Graeger, 2016). Among several contributions, it puts significant emphasis on anchoring practices (Swidler, 2001). Anchoring refers to how a taken for granted quality of a context can undergo change and overlap, if it links to another context (Swidler, 2001). This could happen when structural or geopolitical circumstances change, such as the militarized politics in African security. Anchoring renders alternative practices (through strategies of adaptation or experimentation) possible, and also provides and structures tools and resources (Sending & Neumann, 2011, cited in Bicchi & Bremberg, 2016). New shared repertoires and interactional patterns gradually emerge, and reestablish constitutive rules.

Anchoring in practical terms makes it possible to locate when practices previously connected to civilian values — such as accountability — become related with military ones. Within sites of practice actors bestow value to a particular protection culture. Signs of advancing militarization would mean that the protection policymakers come to accept military values as the central elements of that culture. Steadily the protection of civilians-agenda, for instance, depends on successful linkage with counter-terrorism objectives in order to generate capacity-building, training packages or resources. For example,

participants might start asking how it is possible to adapt (humanitarian/human rights/political/legal) protection requirements to the deployment of offensive operations rather than how offensive operations can be appropriately linked to overarching political objectives including those set out in relevant AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and UN Security Council statements and resolutions on a given conflict situation.

If anchoring makes it possible to trace the everyday, taken for granted activities of the site of protection, the notion of militarization contributes to further knowledge about the character of the change and its implications. A sociological approach to militarization grasps both the discursive and material processes through which societies prepare for war. The process is seen as equally marked by shifts in general societal values and peoples' self-images (discursive) as by quantities of guns and tanks (material) (Lutz, 2006, p. 320). It assumes that societies find themselves in varying degrees of militarization. This perspective is thus useful to grasp the simultaneous militarization and demilitarization of the site of protection in Africa.

Militarization is understood as "the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence" (Geyer, 1989, p. 79). In a similar vein, Lutz (2006) sees militarization as involving "an intensification of the labour and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals." (p. 320) Pervasive patterns of militarization are seen as being predicated on, and justified through, ideological arguments–for instance, about desirable order, and amity/enmity, that further legitimate militarist action (Lutz, 2002, p. 723).

Therefore, militarizing processes transform the meanings and uses of people, things and ideas. Enloe (2000), a leading proponent, critically interrogates how militarization becomes embedded within society, involving cultural, institutional, ideological and economic transformations. She argues that militarization requires decisions by civilians and by militaries, but that these decisions often do not have the exact effects intended. They are rather wrought with ambivalence and confusion (p. 289). From this perspective, militarizing practices can be embedded within the very institutions we consider the hallmarks of civil and democratic governance (p. 289). Demilitarization, on the other hand, means democratization and decentralization, and a setting for meaningful conversations about transparency and accountability (for more about militarization in contemporary Africa, see De Waal 2002; Forte 2012; Verweijen 2015).

Africa and accountability mechanisms for civilian harm: headquarter level practices

The protection of civilians is a core value of African institutions (Jeng, 2015; Murithi, 2016; Kjeksrud, Aasland Ravndal, Øien Stensland, de Coning, & Lotze, 2015; Gelot, 2012). Based on its experiences in protecting civilians as part of Africa-led security

operations in Darfur (2004-2007), Somalia (2007-ongoing), and elsewhere, the AU in 2010 articulated its own definition of protection of civilians as:

> activities undertaken to improve the security of the population and people at risk, and to ensure the full respect for the rights of groups and individual recognized under regional instruments, including the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons, and the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and international law, including humanitarian, human rights and refugee law (AU, 2012)

The definition is deliberately evocative, in part because no consensus around a precise definition exists within the site of protection. In part also because a widely shared view is that civilian protection cannot be a "one size fits all" concept. The view is that it must be molded to context and time, as well as to structural and financial conditions (private communication with AU PSD policymaker, April 2013, Addis Ababa). The Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in AU Peace Support Operations (AU, 2012) outline a four-tiered approach to protection: 1) protection as part of the political process; 2) protection from physical violence; 3) rights-based protection; and 4) the establishment of a protective environment. While this approach has similarities with the UN concept (Kjeksrud, et al., 2016), a significant difference is that African political authority and legal jurisdiction are upheld. It stresses African institutions as the competent first resort for gross human rights abuses on the continent. Thus implicit in the African definition of protection is a challenge to the UNSC's primary responsibility for international peace and security (AU, 2006).

The AU's claims to authority in the protection of civilians field goes hand in hand with its accusation that the UN Security Council has all too-often neglected to carry out its responsibility to uphold international peace and security by abstaining from acting on grave situations of mass violence in Africa. Africa's efforts to protect civilians have helped strengthen the AU's actorness in world politics. Demonstrating capability to act has been perceived as urgent African security policymaking circles, even as some institutions were still in the process of being established (De Coning, Gelot, & Karlsrud, 2016). Recent crises—for instance, in Mali— have brought home the lesson that without African readiness to counter violent extremism, international actors will enter the fray citing interests of global security. This has underscored the role that major powers, donor countries, and global institutions have in militarized politics. Either by direct military means, by financial assistance, or by political legitimating means (UNSC, 2014)

This has led to a situation whereby a model of African stability operations is emerging (De Coning, Gelot, & Karlsrud, 2016), but has lacked an agreed or established political oversight function or accountability framework. At the same time, crisis response capability for counter-terrorism purposes is set to become a top agenda item (AU, 2014b; AU, 2015). As a senior official in the AU Peace and Security Department (AU PSD) characterized it, "Counter-terrorism operations [are] what's at stake. [W]e don't mind to protect the civilians but it is a side effect or a secondary issue." (Private communication, April 2016, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). Accusations that the actions of AU-authorized troops have themselves caused civilian harm is therefore a highly sensitive matter. The

concern with adverse effects of African security operations raises an important concern, similar to that being asked in regard to the UN's experience: When implementation practices seem too far removed from doctrines or rules, this will ultimately harm the institution's credibility and legitimacy (Hunt, 2016; Mateja, 2015).

The generation of accountability mechanisms is fraught given this common knowledge among the protection actors. A core claim is that African actors are best placed to protect "their own".[1] Arguments for accountability and codes of conduct implicitly challenge this discourse. In some circumstances, stabilization and counter-terrorism interventions help advance the objectives of halting violent conflicts and limiting mass violence (Williams, 2013; Hunt, 2016). For this reason, many African state representatives and officials working in African peace and security institutions argue that the current militarization trends are necessary and justified (private communication with several policymakers and diplomats, April 2013 and 2016, Addis Ababa).

Civilian officials involved in the everyday drafting of policy, internal guidance documents and evaluations of human protection efforts therefore have to treat some degree of militarization as a precondition for the site of protection. Their everyday interactions to oversee the development, ratification and implementation of policy that ensures a predominantly civilian character in protection delivery have to relate to a discourse about the current threats and sources of instability on the continent. Guiding the strategy behind African security operations has been the assumption that they would predominantly take on stability operations for a limited duration, which a UN operation charged with longer term peacebuilding role would follow (Akpasom, 2016). Consequently, at the initial stages of putting the African Standby Force (ASF) into operation, the AU gave priority to developing the military elements, leaving development of civilian and police components until later.

Furthermore, the AU Military Staff Committee (MSC), which provides advice to the AU PSC on military and security issues for the maintenance of peace and security on the continent, has purely military expertise as concerns protection. One consequence is that in this engagement between expertise and decision-making in the site of protection, political and civilian approaches to protection are downgraded. Similarly, in the early planning stages of a mission, military planners from the AU Peace Support Operations Division are predominantly involved. There is little or no civilian and police representation, whether from within the peace and security department or other relevant departments of the AU Commission (e.g. political affairs, legal department, etc.). Police chiefs and equivalent civilian representatives are also regularly poorly represented in the meetings of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security. This is a further example of how demilitarizing action by protection actors have to find ways to adapt and relate alternatives with routines and rules of the game (Akpasom, 2016).

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1 This claim rests on normative grounds (solidarity with neighbors, acting as "brother's keeper") but is also made on functional or rationalist grounds (cost effectiveness, speed, geographic proximity). Jeng (2015:188) similarly refers to an ever more codified "duty to act".

These efforts act as anchoring practices, and relate and combine with a militarized shared repertoire of routines, tools, and tacit rules (Graeger, 2016). Symptomatic of this, Akpasom's (2016) study treats civilian, multilateral, dimensions in AU-led interventions as examples of demilitarization. She highlights that African institutions have come to recognize and use an ever-increasing number of civilian and police as part of African security operations. The language of the mandate that the AU PSC agreed on for missions in Somalia, Mali and CAR, displays ambitious multidimensional features (AU, 2012; AU, 2013a; AU, 2013b). Civilian values have been tagged onto and combined with a militarized context. Seen through the practice approach, anchoring requires meticulous work by a concerned grouping. Having said that, anchoring occurs when routine interaction in one context is faced with changing structural elements, when experimentation and adaptation seem compelling. Changes in practice requires work and decision-making, yet it is not thought to represent conscious, deliberate strategy on behalf of strategic actors.

In 2011 the AU PSC encouraged the incorporation of the Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in AU Peace Support Operations into the activities of AMISOM, a mission that initially did not have a protection mandate (AU, 2011a). Civilian protection logics, and longer-term ethical and accountability considerations, were invoked to rein in the erstwhile warfighting expectations placed on AMISOM. However, AMISOM has all along lacked sufficiently well-integrated, funded and developed civilian components to support its protection of civilians strategy (Akpasom, 2016, p. 112).

Accountability mechanisms for civilian harm: field level practices

Taking the specific example of the introduction of accountability mechanisms into AMISOM, specifically a civilian casualty tracking and response cell (CCTARC), we can further trace the anchoring of practices of protection. Since its inception in 2012, the process of making the CCTARC operational within AMISOM has rendered possible an innovative combination of civilian and military means and ends. The mission was set up by the UN Security Council and AU PSC in 2007 and was expected to mainly serve warfighting ends until a UN-led international presence could take over. However, the mission's offensive operations have at times taken a high toll on civilians, leading civilian staff in AMISOM, mission planners in AU PSD and officials in the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), as well as global donors and non-state actors, to advocate strengthening AMISOM's civilian and political functions (Daily Nation, 2016; private communication senior UNSOM official, Baidoa 2016).

In a previous attempt at anchoring concern with civilian harm with the stabilization role of AMISOM, the AU Commission in 2011 advocated the development of a mission-wide protection strategy for AMISOM. Drafted by select civilian officials within the AU PSD, the strategy document makes clear that AMISOM has obligations towards civilian populations, and also sets out the legal framework of international humanitarian law,

along with humanitarian rules and principles that apply to mission operations, procedures and trainings (AU, 2012). AMISOM is the first AU mission to have a protection of civilians strategy streamlined within it. The writing of the strategy drew together and combined two sets of shared repertoires; the combined best practice of the African site of protection one the one hand, and the collective experiences of stabilization in Somalia by AMISOM's personnel on the other.

Under mounting pressure, especially from the United Kingdom (UK), the CCTARC was established under the authority of the UN Security Council and the AU PSC in 2012, and integrated into AMISOM's mandate (UNSC, 2012). Preceding this, the AU had responded by, for example, introducing more stringent chains of command for mortar and artillery fire, and advocated the use of "no-fire-zones" (Lotze & Kasumba, 2012, p. 23). The mission revised its rules of engagement (ROEs), and trained troops in mitigation measures to prevent civilian harm (CIVIC, 2011, p. 14). Multidimensional aspects such as police and civilian components, with the aim of undertaking broader 'stabilization tasks', were gradually introduced into AMISOM.

From the practice perspective, the next step is to trace the adaptation in interaction and the new practical knowledge that is produced. Furthermore, to analyze weather a militarized CCTARC will shape and influence the overall site of protection. AMISOM and the CCTARC are expected to systematically document incidents of civilian harm. However, the Cell has struggled with establishing communication both within the mission structure and outwards, towards the Somali host community (focus group discussion with Somali think tanks and community leaders, Mogadishu, November 2016).

There has been a lack of overall ownership and acceptance of the cell among troop-contributing countries — seen in the limited information-sharing and reporting between sector commanders and the cell — raises the question of whether its insertion was mainly about strategic reputation-saving. The ambitious idea was for the CCTARC to analyze information on civilian harm to support input into military planning and tactical guidance on minimizing civilian casualties. It is quite telling that to remedy the "isolation" of the cell within the mission structure thus far, AMISOM was planning to recruit a military head to lead the cell, to ensure that it can be embedded in military operations and have access to incident data.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the patterns, the mechanisms and processes of protection in Africa. It has contributed to knowledge by analyzing how they are becoming militarized by officials and diplomats. Zooming in on everyday interactions between actors in the site of protection, I have analyzed specifically policy processes that aim to minimize civilian harm by African personnel deployed in security operations.

I argue that unfolding anchoring practices in regard to accountability for civilian harm show how a civilian practice combines in new ways with military-driven practice. The practical knowledge and shared repertoires in regard to the site of protection among the major officials and diplomats is being balanced with warfighting expectations placed on most African security operations today. An innovative practice, in the shape of for example the CCTARC has emerged at the field operation level. This could occur because the actors cleverly create the space to adapt one context to preexisting structures with appeals to changing circumstances, urgent pressures, and availability of resources.

Even so, the CCTARC was established through informal cooperation by a core group of officials and the integration of the unit into the mission structure faces many obstacles. Its establishment supports one of the claims of the practice approach which is that forms of practice precede institutionalization. However, these micro stories are necessary though not in and of themselves sufficient pieces of a puzzle. Policy innovation sometimes stops at one off or ad hoc experimentation and will not produce sufficient mutual learning or new routine ways of working toward protection objectives. In the case of the CCTARC experiment, it is still too early to tell.

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