

## Assembling UN Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism in Ghana

Maya Mynster Christensen

### Abstract

Through the case of Ghana, this article proposes a link between international peacekeeping deployments and national processes of stabilisation. Based on fieldwork among soldiers and police officers, it explores how peacekeeping experiences are transferred and translated into security provision at home within the field of counterterrorism. Introducing the notion of the ‘peacekeeping–counterterrorism assemblage’ as an analytical lens for unpacking the co–production of external and internal security provision and, more specifically, the processes and practices through which international peacekeeping experiences become entangled with national counterterror policing, the article empirically unfolds the relational and societal impact of peacekeeping on domestic security. The exposure to the human consequences of warfare in peacekeeping missions, the article shows, has nurtured a profound awareness of keeping war at a distance, which may have a preventive effect on the policing of the threat of terrorism, as well as on the broader dynamics of domestic security and stability in Ghana.

**Keywords:** UN peacekeeping, counterterrorism, policing, assemblage theory, Ghana

### Résumé

A travers le cas du Ghana, cet article propose un lien entre les déploiements internationaux de maintien de la paix et les processus nationaux de stabilisation. Basé sur un travail de terrain chez les soldats et les policiers, il explore la manière dont les expériences de maintien de la paix sont transférées et traduites en termes de sécurité au niveau national dans le domaine du contre–terrorisme. En introduisant la notion « d’assemblage maintien de la paix–contre–terrorisme » comme lentille analytique pour décortiquer la coproduction de la sécurité externe et interne et, plus spécifiquement, les processus et pratiques par lesquels les expériences internationales de maintien de la paix s’entremêlent avec la police nationale dans la lutte contre le terrorisme, l’article expose empiriquement l’impact relationnel et sociétal du maintien de la paix sur la sécurité nationale. L’article montre que l’exposition aux conséquences humaines de la guerre dans les missions de maintien de la paix a favorisé une prise de conscience profonde de la nécessité de tenir la guerre à distance, ce qui peut avoir un effet préventif sur le maintien de l’ordre face à la menace du terrorisme, ainsi que sur la dynamique plus large de la sécurité intérieure et de la stabilité au Ghana.

**Mots-clés:** maintien de la paix de l’ONU, contre–terrorisme, maintien de l’ordre, théorie des assemblages, Ghana

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The situation in Darfur was very difficult I saw my fellow people being demolished, struggling without water and food. I was feeling disillusioned and I thought to myself: ‘Why am I here?’ But I had to save lives, to secure freedom, and to protect humanity. The way people were struggling I cast my mind back to Ghana, and I said: ‘Oh, thank you God that we don’t have war!’ (Interview, SWAT unit police officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, Oct 2018)

In Ghana, diverse experiences of participation in UN peacekeeping missions across the globe since the 1960s have stimulated an acute awareness of the devastating human consequences of war and armed conflict. As illustrated by the above quote from an interview with a police officer on her recent experiences with peacekeeping in Darfur, the direct exposure to everyday realities of insecurity and fighting for survival serves as a constant reminder of the importance of securing peace. While Ghana is a stable, democratic country, a number of current security developments have the potential to undermine this status. These developments include the expansion of violent extremism and terrorist activities from the Sahel towards the coast and, in particular, the escalation of terrorist attacks in neighbouring Burkina Faso. At the same time, domestic conflict and security dynamics, such as the menace of vigilantism, the presence of foreign missions and interests, and resource-driven communitarian clashes, also make Ghana vulnerable to the threat of terrorism.

In this article I explore how and to what extent peacekeeping experiences from abroad have an impact on security responses to these emerging vulnerabilities. Specifically, I investigate how peacekeeping experiences are translated into and become assembled in Ghana’s response to the threat of terrorism. Ghanaian soldiers and police officers deployed to peacekeeping missions have diverse experiences from operating in countries affected by extremism and terrorist threats, most notably in Lebanon, Somalia and Mali. Yet, not until recently have they been tasked with addressing such threats domestically.

Empirically, this article focuses on how Ghanaian police and military officers’ experiences and knowledge from diverse UN peacekeeping missions inform self-representations, discourses and perceptions of policing within the emergent field of counterterrorism. Ghana’s national strategy for countering terrorism emphasises the significance of prevention, community education and awareness creation as the surest ways to address vulnerabilities to the threat of transnational and domestic terrorism. Although there is no immediate comparative relationship between the responsibilities and tasks soldiers and police officers are given in peacekeeping mission theatres and preventive policing activities in Ghana, I propose that peacekeeping experiences have enhanced their awareness of the significance of engaging in dialogue with community members and of preserving peace – an awareness that may potentially have a positive impact on preventive counterterrorism measures as well as broader dynamics of stabilisation.

Counterterrorism and peacekeeping are usually approached as unrelated, if not opposing domains; they are informed by diverse mandates, security logics and approaches to the use of force, and they build on different ethics and notions of enmity. In Ghana, however, it is the same soldiers and police officers who are mandated the operational response to terrorism at home who are deployed for peacekeeping abroad. Against this background the article asks: how are peacekeeping experiences transferred and translated across these domains, and in which ways are peacekeeping experiences appropriated or circumvented in domestic counterterror policing?

To explore these questions, I draw on assemblage theory, as initially formulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and further developed by DeLanda (2006) and a broad range of scholars, most notably within the fields of international relations and security studies (see, for instance, Acuto & Curtis, 2014; Abrahamsen and Williams, 2009; Berndtsson and Stern, 2011). Assemblage theory offers a “relational understanding of practices and the configurations (assemblages) that they form” (Bueger, 2017:5) which can serve as a useful analytical lens for unpacking the processes and practices through which international peacekeeping experiences become entangled with national counterterror policing, and thus, more generally, the co-production of external/international and internal/national security provision.

Assemblage theory is an attempt to challenge the conception of society as an organic whole. In contrast to organic totalities, which are characterised by the dependent relations between their component parts,

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assemblages are defined by their heterogeneity and shifting relationships. In this regard, the notion of ‘relations of exteriority’ is central. According to DeLanda, these relations imply “that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (2006:10). While organic totalities are defined by relations of ‘interiority’, in the sense that the component parts are “constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole” (DeLanda, 2006:9), an assemblage’s components are involved in different processes that either stabilise or destabilise the assemblages (ibid:12). As such, an assemblage is in a constant process of transformation – simultaneously de-territorialised and re-territorialised (see also Christensen, 2013:7) – and can therefore serve to explain emergence (Ong & Collier, 2005:12).

The notion of assemblage has been used in a number of studies to explain the relationship between local and global structures and how multiple social entities interact. Within the field of security, Abrahamsen and Williams introduce the notion of “global security assemblages” to show how the privatisation of security is part of a more general reconfiguration of relations between the public and private and between the local and the global (2009:3). Like Deleuze and Guattari, they seek to move beyond binary oppositions, as they argue that private security is structured by the *relation* between the public and the private (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009, 2011). According to Abrahamsen and Williams, global security assemblages are defined as “transnational structures and networks in which a wide range of different actors and normativities interact, cooperate and compete to produce new institutions, practices and forms of deterritorialised security” (2011:90).

What I term the ‘peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage’ is characterised by shifting formations that share defining features with global security assemblages. It is an assemblage defined by ‘relations of exteriority’ by component parts that can be detached and plugged into a different assemblage – and as such, it is in a constant process of transformation. More specifically, it is composed of relations between police officers, soldiers and a range of national and international security actors, and of different security logics, sites and governance arrangements. My argument here is that the dynamics of domestic counterterror policing cannot be fully explained without attention to how it is shaped by international peacekeeping experiences. Hence, it is an assemblage that must be understood through a multi-scalar analytical approach to capture how the international translates, adapts and modifies national dynamics (cf. Abrahamsen & Williams, 2017), and the ways in which binary divisions between external and internal security provision are dissolved. Adopting an experiential approach to assemblage thinking, I aim to direct attention to the significance of individual trajectories and subjective experiences in shaping processes of assembly and thus to the micro-dynamics of security governance (Christensen, 2017).

The article is divided into three parts. Following a methodological section, I first unfold the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage by situating the article in the context of scholarly literature on the connection between peacekeeping participation and domestic security dynamics. I then outline the relationship between an increasing entanglement of UN peacekeeping and counterterrorism and illuminate how counterterrorism has emerged as a central domain of security governance in Ghana in the context of the global ‘war on terror’ and the escalating expansion of terrorist and violent extremist acts in the West African region. Second, following this contextual background on the security logics and institutional arrangements that shape the assemblage, I analyse how and to what extent peacekeeping experiences and knowledge are transferred and translated into domestic counterterror policing. These processes of transfer and translation, I argue, are reflected on the one hand in languages of professionalism and human rights awareness, targeting mainly an external audience, and on the other hand, in a profound awareness of the significance of preserving peace, which is reflected in perceptions and practices of policing. I conclude by highlighting the analytical advantages and pitfalls of the assemblage approach and by proposing that UN peacekeeping experiences are productive of attitudinal and behavioural changes that may have a preventive and stabilising impact on security provision in Ghana.

#### **Methods and data material: Tracing processes of assembly**

Assemblages are often experimental spaces (Bueger, 2017:10). As an emerging domain of security governance in Ghana, counterterrorism presents a unique case through which to unfold how different actors, sites and security logics come together. The methodological basis for unfolding the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage builds on two months of fieldwork in Ghana carried out between January 2018 and August 2019. During the fieldwork I conducted 36 interviews and six focus group discussions on the impact of peacekeeping on domestic counterterror policing with personnel at the National Police Headquarters which falls within the counterterrorism unit (CTU) and the special weapons and tactics (SWAT) unit of the Ghana Police Service

(GPS), and with military officers in the 64th Infantry Regiment of the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF). The interviewees included commanding officers at the operational level as well as rank-and-file personnel at the tactic level who were selected by senior officers based on the criteria of having participated in at least one international peacekeeping mission and of being directly involved in domestic counterterrorism.

To generate insight into the development and implementation of Ghana's counterterrorism measures at the strategic level, I also relied on document analysis and conducted interviews with counterterrorism specialists and spokesmen in the Ministry of National Security, Defence Intelligence, Ghana Immigration Service and the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority. Furthermore, the article is informed by observation of classes in the courses 'Improving Response Capacities to Terrorism in Peacekeeping Theatres in Africa' and 'Countering Terrorism in Africa' organised by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) in October 2018, as well as interviews with course participants from the GPS.

Authorisation to conduct interviews with police and military personnel was granted by the top management at the National Police Headquarters and GAF headquarters at Burma Camp in Accra through this project's research partnership with KAIPTC. Gaining access through an institution that is renowned for its status as a centre of excellence and for its mandate to offer training in peacekeeping, including training on human rights and protection of civilians, calls for critical reflection on how issues of positionality inform the type of data material collected. As will be further illuminated below, the interviewees drew on selected representations tailored to demonstrate good conduct, professionalism and human rights awareness that were targeted mainly at an external audience (such as researchers). In order to move beyond these representations, a substantial part of the data collected builds on mundane encounters and conversations with police officers at their office at the National Police Headquarters and observations during briefings, night-time patrols and community outreach activities in Accra. Engaging in these everyday activities offered important insight into how peacekeeping experiences were intuitively put to use in domestic policing, and to what extent these experiences were embedded in standard practices and incorporated at an institutional level, considering also that a large number of the rank-and-file police officers had not been deployed for peacekeeping. It is by combining interviews with insight generated at these mundane encounters that the actors, sites and security logics of the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage have been unfolded and the role of individual trajectories and subjective experiences in shaping processes of assembly has been identified.

### **The impact of peacekeeping at home: Between stabilisation and de-stabilisation**

A growing body of literature has addressed the side effects of peacekeeping missions on host countries (Henry, 2012; Jennings & Bøås, 2015; Rubinstein, 2008), yet we know little about these effects on security dynamics in troop-contributing countries. Important exceptions here are a few studies on the positive and negative impact – as well as the absence of impact – of peacekeeping on domestic policing and stabilisation. In proposing that peacekeeping experiences may have a positive influence on preventive counterterrorism measures, the article contributes to this handful of studies (Dwyer, 2015; Harig, 2015; Levine, 2016; Saati & Wimelius, 2017) which have illuminated how operational tasks from various multinational missions inform internal security operations at home. Focusing on the unanticipated impacts of peacekeeping participation on domestic security dynamics they – together with the other articles in this special issue – address an empirical gap in the literature (see Albrecht, 2022a, 2022b; Abdallah & Aning, 2022; Edu-Afful, 2022; Aubyn, 2022; Alhassan & Asante, 2022).

Introducing the notion of "reverse capacity building," Harris and Goldsmith (2009) discuss how the transfer of skills and capacities to the local police and populations, and the legacies retained from peacekeeping missions, inform how Australian police officers carry out domestic policing upon return. They suggest that police officers who have been deployed to peacekeeping missions believe that they have enhanced their skills and attitudes, and have become more effective, confident and patient in their work. Furthermore, they argue that returned police officers have a "greater capacity and tendency for empathy across social and cultural differences," because they have developed a deepened "sense of tragedy about human nature" during deployment (Harris & Goldsmith, 2009:57). Within the framework of 'democratic policing', Saati and Wimelius (2017) similarly explore how police officers' experiences as peacebuilders are shaping internal policing in Sweden. While the interviewed police officers felt that they had gained new personal and professional knowledge that could be useful in Swedish police work, their peacekeeping experiences were not valued by police authorities, and hence not put to use. In West Africa, Dwyer (2015) has done extensive research on the effects of peacekeeping abroad on domestic security, documenting how grievances and senses of injustice among

deployed soldiers have led to patterns of unrest, mutinies and even direct coups. In doing so, she highlights the *de*-stabilising effects of contributing troops to UN missions (Dwyer, 2015).

In Ghana – one of the world’s largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations – the deployment of troops to the UN operation in Congo (ONUC) has been linked, as a contributing factor, to the military coup in 1966. Yet, following a decade of coups and countercoups, a number of factors suggest that peacekeeping contributions have a stabilising effect on domestic security dynamics. Peacekeeping experiences, it has been argued, have transformed the attitudes and behaviour of security providers, countering the “coup mentality” and restricting military involvement in politics (Aubyn et al, 2019). Especially since the 1990s, when heavier peacebuilding tasks and extended use of force were authorised in these missions, there appears to be a shift from negative to positive impacts of peacekeeping on domestic security in Ghana. As discussed by Levine, the dangers of state collapse and instability have apparently driven home to the GAF and “ingrained in them the idea that mediation and de-escalation are the first-line tools for dealing with conflict and disagreement” (2016:82), and the motivation “to resist military involvement in politics” (2016:90). Extending from Levine’s research on how peacekeeping experiences shape Ghanaian soldiers’ self-perceptions and support rather than harmonious civil-military relations, I set out to explore the effects of peacekeeping experiences within the specific security domain of counterterrorism.

### Peacekeeping and counterterrorism

UN peacekeeping and counterterrorism have until recently been approached and conceptualised as distinct domains. A central principle of peacekeeping is impartiality, and peacekeeping operations have traditionally been characterised by a moral commitment to limited use of force in a context where peacekeepers “have no enemy to kill and destroy” (Charbonneau, 2018; see also Levine, 2014). Counterterrorism, on the other hand, is based on tactics of capturing or killing defined, targeted enemies. In this sense, peacekeeping and counterterrorism are indeed “uncomfortable bedfellows” (Karlsrud, 2017a).

However, during the last decade, the global ‘war on terror’ has resulted in the increasing blurring and entanglement of these domains. From being a controversial topic at the UN, terrorism and counterterrorism have gradually moved to the centre of UN policy, as UN member states have begun to cite terrorism as a motivating factor to increase peacekeeping support (Karlsrud, 2017a). The profound effects of the war on terror on UN peacekeeping is a consequence of an orientation toward a threat environment of terrorism and violent extremism (Neethling, 2019) characterised by hybrid and asymmetric threats. Especially across the African security landscape, there has been a rapid increase in militant attacks, and violent extremism and terrorist networks have increasingly posed new challenges to peacekeeping operations and peacekeeping actors (Neethling, 2019). The rise in terrorist attacks on peacekeepers has drawn attention to the capabilities of peacekeepers to carry out their responsibilities under the growing threats of terrorism, and it is increasingly debated whether UN peacekeepers should be given counterterrorism tasks (Karlsrud, 2017b:1217).

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has not only been one of the deadliest in UN history, it has also been paradigmatic of the increasing entanglement of the contradictory frameworks, practices and ethics of peacekeeping and counterterrorism. This entanglement is an effect of the parallel deployment of the peacekeeping mission and the French-led counterterror operation, *Opération Barkhane* – an operation supported by G5 Sahel, US and European contingents that was launched in 2014 with the declared aim of preventing the region from turning into a safe haven for terrorist groups. The “division of labour” between the two interventions is dependent on the ability and authority “to make the distinction between terrorist and non-terrorist actors, and between spheres of terrorist activity and legitimate war/peace politics” (Charbonneau, 2018). Here, counterterrorism is a military logic based on the idea of the *creation of space* for politics, whereas peacekeeping is based on the idea of *support of* a political process. In practice, however, the line of division between MINUSMA and Barkhane is constantly challenged, sometimes even undermined, by the fluidity of conflict actors and local conflict dynamics (Charbonneau, 2018, 2017). And because MINUSMA has been deployed to help extend state authority in territories controlled by violent extremists and terrorist factions, it has become a main party to the conflict (Karlsrud, 2017b:1216).

MINUSMA has been termed “a laboratory for exploration and innovation in UN peacekeeping” (Neethling, 2019), and described as a mission, which is suggestive of a move toward “UN counterterrorism operations” (Karlsrud, 2017b). This move, I propose, is reflected in a more global trend toward an increasing emphasis on counterterrorism, also in the field of domestic security politics where the war on terror is productive of a convergence between the police and the military and between internal and external security (see for instance Brooks, 2002; Edmunds, 2016; Head & Mann, 2009). As I demonstrate below when I further

unfold the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage, Ghana is currently a laboratory for the future in this regard.

### Counterterrorism in Ghana

Assemblage theory has particular analytical power when it comes to examining complex structures of emerging governance arrangements (Bueger, 2017). In Ghana, counterterrorism has only recently emerged as a central domain of security governance and can serve as a case for exploring these complexities. The peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage is constituted by relations between a range of security institutions, including the police, the military and intelligence agencies, and civil society organisations and religious authorities – a complex matrix of local and national governance arrangements extending into both the public and private spheres. Apart from experiences from international peacekeeping, the specific dynamics of this assemblage are shaped by regional threats and global developments in counterterrorist measures, and its emergence should be examined in the light of the expansion of the war on terror in the post-9/11 era, as well as in the context of the rise in terrorist activities in neighbouring countries.

On 15 March 2016, the National Security Council (NSC) issued a statement on its decision to step up counterterrorism measures in Ghana. Based on a review of terrorist attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire as well as other extremist activities in West Africa, the council decided that there is a “credible terrorist threat” in Ghana, and therefore advised the public to “be vigilant, cautious and curious, and report any unusual circumstances to the law enforcement agencies” (Adjei, 2016). At the same time, the drafting and subsequent implementation of the ‘national counterterrorism framework’ was initiated (cf. Christensen & Edu-Afful, 2019). Under conditions of intensified regional instability and a potential for cross-border spill-over effects of extremism, criminal activities and terrorist attacks in the neighbouring countries, security actors in Ghana have highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to preventing acts of terrorism and for developing the ability to respond in a timely manner. However, the decision to develop and implement a counterterror framework, I suggest, should also be understood in the light of the commodification of policing and security in the war on terror, which has given rise to increasing transnational circulations and marketing of counterterror models and measures. While Ghana has not experienced any terrorist attacks on home soil, it has recently become a key site for the import, testing and development of these models.

Ghana's counterterrorism framework operates through four mutually reinforcing pillars: 1) *Prevent* – measures to prevent terrorist attacks by addressing the root causes, minimising vulnerability, and building resilience; 2) *Preempt* – activities to detect and deter a terrorist threat; 3) *Protect* – measures to protect vulnerable infrastructure and spaces; and 4) *Respond* – activities to mitigate impact and recover from terrorist incidents. At the heart of the framework is a well-coordinated inter-agency collaboration which encourages the timely sharing of information and intelligence and operational coordination. Even though the state is primarily responsible for the protection of the population, the framework states that the implementation hereof depends on close cooperation between all arms of government, state agencies, non-state actors, the general public, and the international society – a network through which different normativities of security logics operate.

The GPS plays a principal role in the implementation of the counterterrorism framework. Under the oversight of the NSC, chaired by the president, the police are constitutionally mandated the operational response to terrorism. In line with other counterterror responses across the globe, the GPS is expected to closely collaborate with a range of security, law enforcement, immigration and intelligence agencies. At the operational level, anti-terrorism units have been established in security agencies such as the CTU, the SWAT unit of the GPS, the special forces within the 64th Infantry Regiment of the GAF, and a counterterrorism unit of the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI). Furthermore, close cooperation with civil society such as traditional and religious leaders is considered an essential part of building a resilient society capable of tackling terrorism (see Abdallah & Aning, 2022). Given their influential positions in Ghana, these leaders have a responsibility to employ local mechanisms and religious teachings to educate the youth about the dangers associated with extremism and how to counter extremist narratives.

The counterterrorism framework addresses domestic drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism through a comprehensive approach. With emphasis on the significance of prevention and pre-emption, the framework aims to identify vulnerable individuals or groups before they progress into violent extremism, and to tackle the underlying socio-economic and governance issues that create the conditions for radicalisation and extremism. At the same time, it is emphasised in the framework that the threat posed by terrorist networks, organisations, and individuals should also be assessed by closely considering regional and global dynamics. At

the strategic level, the development and implementation of Ghana's counterterrorism approach is informed by global trends related to globalisation and the advancement in technology, which enables the planning and execution of sophisticated terror attacks as well as regional conflict dynamics. In this context, Ghana's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions is estimated to represent a source of threat to the country, as terrorist groups like Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda, AQIM and Boko Haram have consistently criticised peace operations as an affront.

### **Translating peacekeeping experiences into domestic counterterror policing**

Regional insecurity and the risk of spill-over effects from conflicts in the neighbouring countries constitute a central motivation for Ghana to support peacekeeping missions. Apart from the linkages between peacekeeping, territorial self-defence and threat mitigation, other motivating rationales for supporting peacekeepers are political, normative and economic (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). In Ghana, six decades of participation in UN peacekeeping missions have concrete impacts at the level of macro-political and economic dynamics, not least in terms of strengthened foreign policy relations and financial gains earned through the UN reimbursement packages and mission subsistence allowances given to deployed personnel (Aubyn et al, 2019). At the level of the micro-dynamics of everyday practices, peacekeeping contributions have a more diffuse impact. In the context of counterterror policing, police and military officers both *selectively* and *intuitively* engage in processes of translating and appropriating peacekeeping experiences.

In order to understand these processes of translation and appropriation – and hence what feeds into the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage – it is important to note that it is not simply experiences of being exposed to violent extremism and terrorist threats in mission theatres that inform practices of policing, but also more 'traditional' peacekeeping experiences. Officers interviewed for this study have been deployed to a variety of conflict environments and have peacekeeping experiences from missions in Lebanon, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Darfur, South Sudan, East Timor and Kosovo. In these missions, they have applied principles of democratic, community-oriented and intelligence-led policing. They have also been responsible for a broad range of tasks linked, for instance, to provision of public safety, assistance to the host nation police, and registration of arms and ammunition. More specifically, they have been engaged in diverse patrol and community outreach activities, such as key leader engagement and organisation of community committees, security assessment of IDP camps, and sensitisation on sexual violence, and they have handled cases related to domestic violence and victim support. According to the interviewed officers, it is the *accumulated* experiences from these tasks combined with their direct exposure to the dynamics and devastating consequences of violent conflicts that inform counterterror policing in the domestic security environment. Hence, the peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage demands awareness toward the ways in which a number of diverse components come together and are activated across diverse settings and domains.

### ***Languages of professionalism, human rights and improved confidence***

"The UN makes a mark because the UN has got a system that always ensures best international standards are adopted in our work," a police officer in the SWAT unit noted in an interview, explaining that his experiences from UN peacekeeping have improved his awareness of the rule of law and turned him into "a real professional police officer." Similarly, other interviewed police officers have drawn on languages of professionalism and have stressed how their awareness of human rights and gender issues has been enhanced. This awareness has been stimulated as a result of pre-deployment training, but more predominantly through conversations and interactions with deployed personnel from other nations and on the basis of lessons learned from everyday assignments within their area of responsibility. A police officer, who had been deployed to the peacekeeping mission in Sudan, and who was about to be deployed for peacekeeping in Somalia, describes how his peacekeeping experiences represented "a paradigm shift" in his approach to policing, for instance in relation to practices of arrest, detention and use of force:

After the mission I started to act differently. When I make arrests, I will not use excessive force, I will not beat the suspect. I have gained a new awareness about human rights, and I have realised that we can only detain people for 48 hours – otherwise they should be taken to court. My exposure to the international community has helped me to respect human rights and also to know that policing is not all about arrest and prosecution, but about care and protection. As a police officer you always think that you are doing the right thing, but someone who has been out for peacekeeping has a different emphasis on care and protection. International standards

tell us that we should apply principles of proportionality. (Interview, police officer, National Police Training School, Accra, August 2019)

Such representations, and similar languages based on normative human rights discourses and police professionalism, I suggest, are intended mainly for an external audience. Yet, they are representations that coexist with officers' reflections on how they have improved their skills and confidence due to international exposure and new responsibilities in the mission areas. In different ways, interviewed officers have emphasised how initial experiences of uncertainty, even embarrassment, have gradually been transformed into new competences during the period of deployment. An officer who was responsible for receiving and filing all the situation reports (SITREPS) explains how peacekeeping improved both his technological and interpersonal skills:

I was more or less like unconsciously incompetent when I went there [on peacekeeping]. I did not want to go to the office to use the computer because I did not want to expose my ignorance. But the deputy commissioner insisted that I should go to the office. I was handicapped, I did not know what to do. But my skills have been enhanced. Because I had to deal with other people, it also created a cultural awareness and broadened my horizon. (Interview, police officer, Nima Police Station, Oct 2018)

Peacekeeping experiences have not only led to new skills and new mindsets. As illuminated below, peacekeeping experiences have also shaped operational practices, especially within the field of community policing.

### *Nurturing community trust*

Police officers point out that lessons learned from UN pre-deployment courses and peacekeeping missions have stimulated an awareness of new approaches and strategies that are being adapted and translated into counterterrorism policing in urban areas. First, a number of security and human rights norms adopted from UN missions are being incorporated into the ongoing training of CTU officers. For instance, 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) is a key principle guiding the ongoing training of the unit, the commander of the CTU explained (Interview, National Police Headquarters, Oct 2018). When they counter terrorism, his officers may at times be tempted to 'overreact', he points out, and in this context, it is highly significant that they have been trained to promote and protect human rights. Second, mission experiences of engaging with the civil population during patrols and community-based activities are productive of police work upon returning home. As a police officer who has been deployed for peacekeeping in Darfur argues, returning peacekeepers have improved their capacities within the fields of community and democratic policing in particular:

The most important thing I learned during my deployment was to elicit information from the population during patrols. In the police force, we can see who has been deployed [to peacekeeping missions] due to their improved performance – their performance is different, especially in terms of interacting with the public. The strategies we brought home have really improved our work. (Interview, FPU officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, Oct 2018)

Similarly, an officer in the CTU unit explains how peacekeeping experiences have inspired a different approach to patrols:

I have learned a lot from my UN experiences when it comes to patrolling. Before, when I did patrols, I would just drive quickly through the area. When I deployed for patrols, I always moved with my driver, because I did not know how to drive. But in South Sudan I learned how to drive, how to move on my own. When I did foot patrols, I adopted the Italian approach, I was interacting with people to get information, and I started to understand how I could engage with and sensitise the community in order to gather intel. (Interview, police officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, August 2019)

Upon returning home, the officer went back to the police training school to implement some of the approaches to community policing he had adopted during the mission. According to him, the majority of young police officers fail to understand the significance of engaging and interacting with the community during patrols: "They are just going out into the community, sitting and waiting, without talking to people, and then they will return to the police station and report that 'the place is cool'" (ibid).

Community outreach is a central cornerstone of the GPS' s counterterror activities. In order to prevent and pre-empt violent extremism, CTU officers patrol areas identified on the basis of the prevalence of 'signs of danger' and 'vulnerability to radicalisation'. Awareness-raising, trust-building and intelligence-collecting activities are central activities in the response to these emergent threats. Officers explain that they spend most of their time in the streets educating the people on radicalisation and hate language and explaining the



dynamics that can lead to political and mass violence. In a context where trust in the police is limited, community members are often reticent about engaging with the police and especially sharing information on signs of danger. In seeking to gather intelligence in areas characterised by distrust in the police, several police officers point out that experiences from UN peacekeeping are highly significant. From their international deployments they have learned that trust takes time to build, and that it is by engaging in conversations with community members on a regular basis that trust is gradually nurtured (for more on community policing in Ghana, see Albrecht, 2022b).

### *Enmity and perceptions of terrorist threats*

At a more general level, peacekeeping experiences are shaping the ways in which officers perceive of, approach and police the threat of terrorism in Ghana. Soldiers deployed for peacekeeping in Lebanon describe how their exposure to Hezbollah has improved their understanding of violent extremism and militant groups, most notably because they have been familiarised with their modus operandi, with dynamics of organisation and mobilisation, and with the tactics and technologies they employ. From being a distant abstraction, the figure of the terrorist has become linked to concrete conflict dynamics in a context where the peacekeeping mandate of monitoring the cessation of hostilities and helping to ensure humanitarian access to the civilian population is becoming increasingly entangled with international counterterrorism operations. While the soldiers point out that security dynamics in Lebanon and Ghana, respectively, cannot be compared, their exposure to the threat of terror has inspired counterterror training activities at home. The scenarios they employ for exercises aimed at assessing the readiness of personnel in dealing with terror threats and terrorist attacks are, for instance, inspired by their exposure to kidnappings and attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Lebanon. According to a soldier in the counterterrorist unit of the 64th Infantry Regiment, this has improved their preparedness in Ghana:

During the mission, we have heard a lot from people who are affected by terrorism, and we have realised that we are not prepared for a terror attack in my country. But now we have adopted new mechanisms. We use simulation exercises to test our preparedness, and that has impacted positively on our capabilities to counter a potential attack. (Interview, soldier, GAF General Headquarters, Accra, July 2019)

Transferring experiences from actual conflict settings characterised by combat actions against defined enemies, it can be argued, can exacerbate the fear of terrorism and trigger militarised responses to the threat of terror. Surprisingly perhaps, interviewed officers expressed no enmity or hostility when describing how their peacekeeping experiences inform their outlook on and approach to counterterrorism in Ghana. Instead, they highlighted that their exposure to terrorism in peacekeeping theatres has enhanced their awareness of the importance of addressing root causes through preventive measures:

Our duty is to protect the citizens, and to do so we need to address the root causes. We need to explore why groups are divided, why some people can be mobilised into militant groups, and we need to address their grievances. I have told my people [in the unit] that they have to protect the peace by getting close to people. (Interview, CTU officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, August 2019)

Among police officers in the CTU, the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism is based on community outreach activities aimed at sensitisation and education. When engaging in these activities, notions of ‘the radical’ and ‘the terrorist’ are almost absent from their vocabulary, in contrast to many other contexts – including peacekeeping theatres – where the threat of terrorism is most commonly linked to an ‘Islamist Other.’ For these counterterror officers, the radical could be *anyone*, even “your own disgruntled sister or brother,” they often point out. At the same time, they consciously avoid ‘war on terrorism’ – an otherwise dominant state discourse across the globe. As explained by an officer, “If you have seen how war causes harm to human life, you will know that war is not a means to achieve an aim (Interview, National Police Headquarters, Accra, January 2019).”

### *Keeping war at a distance*

Why do we have freedom in Ghana? I was deployed as a police officer in Kosovo. I never walk with my weapon in any areas. When I came back to Ghana, having a pistol by my side, I began to ask myself: 'What is freedom? What is security?' (Interview, training instructor, KAIPTC, Accra, Oct 2018)

Experiences from UN missions have produced an awareness of keeping the peace in Ghana. As the police instructor explains in the above quote, experiences with new approaches to policing have triggered a number of fundamental questions related to security and freedom upon homecoming. Positive, but predominantly negative experiences from the missions are productive of this awareness. Without exception, the soldiers and police officers interviewed for this study pointed out that awareness of the significance of preserving the peace is closely linked to their encounters with the tragic, human consequences of warfare in different UN missions. Images of women and children on the run with their belongings, but with nowhere to find refuge, conversations with rape victims, the smell of dead bodies, and combatants targeting civilians to get revenge are among the memories that are imprinted in them. These memories have installed fear, but also empathy and a strong appreciation of being able to return home to a stable, democratic and largely peaceful society:

In the missions, they have authoritarian regimes. And people are confined, their movements are restricted, and they are traumatised – so even when small things happen, it catches fire, and it bursts into violence. We do not want that in our own country. In Ghana, we have freedom of speech, we are not confined and therefore we have been able to minimise the threats linked to radicalisation. (Interview, FPU police officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, Oct 2018)

Awareness of the importance of keeping the peace, interviewed officers argue, has an impact not only on policing, but also on society more broadly. This impact must be understood against the background of a long history of peacekeeping. "We are born out of the UN missions," a police officer stated to explain the ways in which experiences from UN peacekeeping have been transferred and translated both within security institutions and civil society through generations. Across Ghanaian society, officers, former officers and civilians exposed to the consequences of violence and conflict in peacekeeping theatres will act as "custodians of peace," the officer explains:

They have been exposed to war, and they have brought these experiences home. Some of them are the chief in their village or other types of authorities that will be consulted during times of unrest. Because Ghanaian society is like an extended family, a society building on religious co-existence and marriages across ethnic affiliations, the knowledge brought home [from UN missions] will spread from authorities, through families, to the ordinary man. UN peacekeeping experiences have enlightened our people, so we will make sure to keep war at a distance. (Interview, police officer, National Police Headquarters, Accra, Oct 2018)

### **Conclusion**

Exposure to violence and war during deployment in international missions can have a number of well-documented negative mental health effects on personnel in a post-deployment context, including post-traumatic stress and mental disorders, substance abuse, and heightened risk-taking, aggression, and violent behaviour (see, for instance, MacManus et al, 2015). This article has contributed new perspectives on the ways in which exposure to violence and war can have positive post-deployment effects. Suggesting a potential link between international deployment and national processes of stabilisation, this goes against cases from other West African countries demonstrating that peacekeeping abroad produces tensions and grievances that contribute to conflicts upon homecoming and increase the potential for mutinies (cf. Dwyer, 2015). Is it possible, I have asked, that peacekeeping experiences can have a preventive effect in the field of counterterror policing in Ghana? Introducing the notion of the 'peacekeeping-counterterrorism assemblage', I have sought to illuminate the intersections between international peacekeeping and national counterterror policing, and the ways in which peacekeeping experiences are transferred, translated and appropriated as individual soldiers and police officers move across these domains. By adopting an experiential approach to assemblage thinking, I have drawn attention toward the significance of the micro-dynamics of individual trajectories and subjective experiences in shaping processes of assembly.

Mobilising assemblage thinking as an analytical tool to highlight the relationship between international and national security dynamics enables us to move beyond binary oppositions. In this regard, a central ambition

for this article has been to reassess categorical distinction between external and internal security provision, and to show how distinct domains of peacekeeping and counterterrorism become increasingly intertwined – not only in international theatres of operations, but also at home. The peacekeeping–counterterrorism assemblage I have explored is configured by different security logics and normativities, and it is characterised by the emergence of unintended “lines of flight” (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) between different governance arrangements across diverse settings. Here, assemblage theory holds value for unfolding how an unexpected component – in this case peacekeeping experiences – shapes everyday dynamics of counterterrorism in a domestic context. However, in setting out to explore the impact of peacekeeping on domestic security provision, the assemblage approach leaves one important question unanswered. As emphasised by Levine, we need to consider whether there is anything *distinctive* about peacekeeping abroad (Levine, 2016:91). In the domain of counterterror policing in Ghana, a number of global patterns of circulation are productive and feed into the perceptions and practices of policing. At an experiential level, critical events across the globe have come to shape perceptions of threats linked to radicalisation and violent extremism, while the spread of counterterrorism models has produced key transformations in security discourses and practice internationally. It is the dynamic interaction of these multiple paths of circulation that must be taken into account when we seek to understand and explain the experiential micro–dynamics that shape the emergence of the ‘peacekeeping–counterterrorism assemblage’ in Ghana.

While peacekeeping is not the only experience shaping counterterror policing in Ghana, this article has shown that specific experiences from peacekeeping participation have shaped the self–representations, perceptions and mindsets of soldiers and police officers. To begin with, peacekeeping experiences have nurtured democratic values and a respect for human rights which underpin current counterterror policing efforts. Furthermore, soldiers and police officers argue that peacekeeping participation has improved their capabilities and performances, especially in terms of community policing and outreach activities, which are central counterterrorism measures in Ghana. Here, a set of normativities, approaches and skills adopted during peacekeeping are transferred, appropriated and put to use in a domestic context.

While positive attitudinal and behavioural changes can be traced directly to experiences of peacekeeping, there are, however, a number of challenges when it comes to institutionalisation at the organisational level. Returning peacekeepers explain how they seek to institutionalise new modalities of community policing; yet, they also note that the politicisation of policing in Ghana makes it difficult to transfer and implement novel approaches. Not only are there a number of clashes between UN policing and local approaches to policing – one police officer, for example, explains how “the UN does things according to the rule of law, while the Ghana Police Service does things according to tradition” – but at the same time, returning peacekeepers also experience that authorities and their management are often reluctant to implement new approaches and practices based on lessons learned from UN peacekeeping. As a consequence, the degree to which UN experiences are institutionalised within the GPS and GAF is limited, fuzzy and often traceable mainly when examining how individual officers operate within the domain of counterterror policing.

Yet, at a much more fundamental level, peacekeeping experiences have a substantive effect when it comes to perceptions of enmity and production of an awareness of the significance of keeping war at a distance. As also emphasised by Levine (2016), exposure to violence and war in UN missions has nurtured an appreciation of peace and democracy which inspires considerations about prevention, for instance in terms of counteracting the influence of individuals or groups believing that they can benefit from violence. Among police officers and soldiers with counterterrorism responsibilities, these considerations are reflected in preventive approaches to identifying risks and vulnerabilities and to building resilience through community outreach activities – rather than in ‘declaring a war on’ terrorism. Through relations and interactions, the awareness of keeping war at a distance has been diffused into the social fabric that informs everyday security governance, and it thus has both a relational and societal impact. It is this impact mainly which I propose has a preventive effect on the counterterror policing and the broader dynamics of domestic security and stability in Ghana.

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