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MALI'S SECURITY CLUSTERS AND HUMAN PROTECTION VALUE IN UN PEACE OPERATIONS

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Abstract

In the contemporary landscape of international security, a nuanced analysis of scenarios and conflicts is imperative, given the diverse range of actors and threats involved. Within this complex context, the United Nations (UN) peace operations play a pivotal role, underscoring the organization's commitment to maintain peace and security around the world. Central to these efforts is the unwavering dedication to ensuring Human Rights (HR) and safeguarding individuals from the multifaceted challenges that arise in conflict zones.

The purpose of this work is to examine how the UN peace operations aspects and interactions may affect the human protection value. To achieve this proposal, we will use the *security clusters* framework designed by Karin Fierke and the *norm cluster* concept developed by Carla Winston combined as a theoretical foundation to explore this issue. Using this outlook, this article was designed to investigate how the dynamic between different types of shared perceptions of threat and interests among states in a *security cluster* affects the shared human protection value intrinsic to certain norms.

In order to reach our goal, we chose a case-study approach with the aim to capture the complexities of the phenomenon. So, the case is the UN peace operation in Mali, namely United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in which context it is possible to identify the norm implementation of Protection of Civilians (PoC), Counterterrorism and Stabilization. Therefore, MINUSMA was selected to assess the management implementation of these norms in a conflict environment as well as its complexity and overlap of these dynamics. Winston's *norm cluster* concept will be used as an analytical tool to the following norms: PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization.

This document is structured in five sections. First, we demonstrate how the human protection value is recognized within the UN. Second, we point out the *security clusters* framework and the *norm cluster* concept to apply to MINUSMA. Next, it is reported the particularities of MINUSMA alongside the PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization norms. Then, we will delineate the multiple relationships incorporated in Mali's *security clusters* and their effect on human protection value as the effect of the implementation simultaneously of these three norms. For the analysis of the interaction between the overlap implementation of these three norms at MINUSMA, we used information from reports and interviews made by other researchers.

Thus, this article aspires to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and dynamics associated with UN peace operations, offering valuable insights into how these endeavors may either fortify or compromise the core value of protecting human lives in conflict zones.

Key-words: Human Protection; UN Peace Operations; Security Cluster; Mali (MINUSMA).

Human Protection Realm

Humanitarian interventions and peace operations involve human protection[2] issues and were created within the UN. In the post-Cold War scenario, historical events of mass atrocities, such as: the humanitarian situation in Somalia in 1993, Rwandan genocides in 1994, Bosnia in 1995, and Kosovo in 1999, led to a deepening of the debate on humanitarian interventions. These debates were also furthered by the expressive multiplication of Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) during this period. Peace operations[3] were created by the UN to control, manage, and resolve armed conflicts.

Discussions on the theme of interventions for humanitarian purposes are based on the just war theory[4], which identify the conditions and actions that justify the use of war[5] (GOLDIM, 2003). From the emergence of the theory of just war to the promulgation of the UN Charter in 1945, the world scene experienced several international orders fragmented by the reflexes of the great world conflicts. In the post-Cold War context, a new international order based on the collective security system and the evolution of International Law (IL) and Human Rights (HR), resulting in the named Humanity Law, has been created a dimension in the international context, where there is the opportunity and capacity for common action in relation to human protection issues. It reflects the growing worldwide recognition that human security[6], including human dignity, HR and individual freedoms, should represent together part of the central purposes of state policies and international institutions (ICISS, 2001, p. 6).

Thus, there have been transformations in the international normative scenario. In terms of the Humanity Law, it was observed the expansion of the definition of "humanity". According to Martha Finnemore, the conception of who is human, and consequently worthy of protection, has undergone an expansion characterizing an enlargement, or rather, the universalization of the definition of "humanity", based on human equality (FINNEMORE, 2003).

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[2]The term “protection” involves various interrelated concepts, including the protection of civilians, HR, and humanitarian protection, although there are important differences among them.

[3]This concept was grounded from the idea of collective security in order to maintain international peace and security.

[4]The doctrine of just war (*bellum iustum*) predates the formation of national states, and has its roots in the Greco-Roman tradition, Christian ethics and Western philosophy (ACHARYA, 2015), being improved between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Contemporaneously, the foundations of just war theory are manifested in the International Law of Armed Conflicts, also called International Humanitarian Law (IHL), composed of the Hague and Geneva Conventions.

[5]We consider war as a hostile interaction between two or more states with the use of their armed forces for the purpose of imposing, by force, their will to the opponent (CLAUSEWITZ, 2010)

[6]The expression "Human Security" appears, in 1994, within the framework of the political development agenda, in the text of the Human Development Report, prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), having two components in its definition: first, the "security against chronic threats, such as hunger, disease and repression", second, "protection from sudden disturbances and harmful to daily living standards" (UNDP, 1994, p. 23). This concept is based on the notion that the daily experiences of insecurity of individuals, in addition to state issues, also affect the international order (COLLINS, 2010).

In relation to the evolution of HR as universal values, there were the development of new and stronger norms and protection mechanisms based on milestones, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR - 1948) and others[7], which jointly structured the field of International Human Rights Law (IHRL). These documents have become universal guidelines for state action, adding that

> [...] one of the most important long-term effects of these documents, in normative terms, is their focus on the legal situation of the individual in international law, which has exercised fundamental influence on the limit and basis for intervention, as well as underpinning relevant subsequent policy concepts such as Responsibility to Protect (R2P)[8]. (KENKEL, 2012, p. 25, our translation).

Amidst this conception of Humanity Law, certain concepts and understandings on the international scenario have been modified and added, such as the notion of the regime of international responsibility, the idea of world public order, and others normative framework. In this sense, new circumstances, new actors, new states, new subjects have emerged, as well as new expectations and demands regarding the behavior of states and other actors on the subject of human protection.

Human protection focuses on safeguarding the rights and well-being of civilians affected by armed conflicts, violence, and other humanitarian crises. In general, its involves the rights of individuals, that is, HR and presents itself as a collective responsibility. According to Victoria Holt and Tobias Berkman,

> [...] 'protection' is often vague and undefined, particularly in the most challenging and non-permissive environments where mass killing is likely to occur. [...] Deploying peacekeepers without either a clear vision of how to protect civilians or the means and authority to do so may result in a tragic shortfall. (HOLT, BERKMAN, 2006, p. 5 - 50).

This tragic deficit can already be seen in the increase from 15,500 serious violations of children's rights in armed conflict in 2016 to 26,425 in 2020[9] (UN, 2021). It is also linked to the difficulty of responding to events of exacerbated violation of HR and IHL in the context of armed conflict, such as the historical events of mass atrocities mentioned before. This crisis in protecting innocent people which has caused enormous damage to the UN's reputation (FOLEY, 2023) is expressed in the insufficiency and slowness of responses and deployment of troops in Somalia and Rwanda, for example[10].

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[7]The following may be added: the four Geneva Conventions and the two Additional Protocols; the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948); the two International Convenants (1966) on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998.

[8]The report entitled "The Responsibility to Protect", which was unanimously adopted in September 2001, outlined the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) which involves effective and timely preventive action to four restricted crimes and violations, such as: genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (UNGA, 2005, §138), but with the use of all available instruments the UN system, regional, sub-regional partners and civil society and themselves member states. Therefore, R2P is a limited concept and has clear borders being applicable in cases of mass atrocities committed by man (FRANCIS, POPOVSKI, SAMPFORD, 2012).

[9]In the same year, more than 82 million people were forcibly displaced, including refugees and internally displaced persons, which represents a significant increase from the more than 65 million registered in 2016 (UNHCR, 2021).

[10]Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Syria are similar cases.

Given that, from a general perspective, UN peacekeeping missions are considered successful or unsuccessful on the basis of their record in protecting civilians (FOLEY, 2023), protection is recognised as a shared value in this community. With this in mind, this study will start from the assumption that the human protection value could be an index for analysing the effectiveness of the implementation of UN peace operations since aspects, facts, and dynamics that affect this value undermine the effective implementation. Thus, it is imperative to clarify issues that involve the protection of people, and elucidate how the interactions during the UN peace operations affects the human protection value.

The protection of populations affected by crises is essential for the purpose and values of the UN. In early 2020, UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, launched a *Call for Action on Human Rights*[11] in order to reaffirm the importance of the centrality of HR for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (OHCHR, 2020). To implement, in particular, rights in times of crisis, he indicated the development of a *Protection Agenda* in which all UN field presences should be informed by a risk and opportunity analysis of HR (FOLEY, 2023, p. 144). The main effort of the *Agenda for Protection* is the articulation of a collective vision and common approach to protection within the UN since there are several institutional approaches in the different agencies, in which each has its definitions, terminologies, policies, strategic approaches, and guidelines (LILLY, 2022, p. 5). The objective of this agenda is to promote internal coherence and reconcile differences. In this sense, the debate on protection is on the agenda in the internal discussions of the UN which, in turn, reveals the relevance of the human protection value inside the UN. Adjacent, it is believed that an investigation about how interactions may affect the human protection value in a context which has different approaches implementing in a peace operation can contribute to the clarification of the correspondences and divergences of this protective agenda.

Security Clusters **Framework**

To achieve our goal, this paper will part from the approach of security clusters. According to Fierke (2007, p. 51), *security clusters* refer to a theoretical framework that analyzes the multiple relationships that constitute different types of shared perceptions of threat and interests among states. It assumes a field of relationships which includes a threat, a threatener, the threatened, the protector or means of protection and the protected. This perspective differs from the others because it don't consider the one-way relationship between a threatener and the threatened. This makes the analysis of security more complex

[11]The Call to Action on Human Rights sets out seven priority areas: including the importance of human issues in times of crisis; gender equality and equal rights for women; public participation and civic space; rights of future generations; collective action and new frontiers of HR.

and alter the perspective away from a focus on the unitary states or in the individuals (FIERKE, 2007) what seems to be more useful to analyze the multifaceted conflict of Mali.

It challenges the idea that there is just one single cause that threat the stability, and there is possible to fix a single referent object to be secured. According to this perspective, the conceptualization of one-way cause and effect relationship is inadequate because various interpretations of the problem are possible and the threat concern multiple dimensions (FIERKE, 2007, p. 47). As Fierke (2007, p. 52) observes: “threats are placed in the context of political relationship, demonstrating the multiple linkages to other security issues.” So, this approach allows for the creation of diverse security relationships among various referent objects and types of threats, as will be demonstrated hereafter.

Another benefit of this broad view is the possibility to insert alternative referent objects, to incorporate internal as well as external threats, besides the different participants can be identified and understood (UNWIN, 2016). Further, it facilitates a distinct formulation of security concepts and epistemology, enabling a more flexible approach to comprehending and addressing threats. (UNWIN, 2016). It also helps to reduce the risk of oversimplification, analysis and biased conclusions about the most appropriate form of action in response that a one-way relationship can produce (FIERKE, 2007, p. 48).

However, the main limitation of this framework is that as “it creates complexity by opening up the number of interested parties and the subjective nature of the security, make finding agreement on policy decisions to address threats challenging.” (UNWIN, 2016). In this way, security has been broadened to such an extent that it is difficult to respond to it. Although we believe that this approach can be more suitable and enlightened for our analysis, because instead of establishing a “hierarchy of threats, it requires a rethinking and a mapping of the relationships that constitute various threats to human life” (FIERKE, 2007 p. 52).

Norm Cluster **Concept**

Similarly, as this framework of *security clusters,* the concept of *norm cluster* developed by Carla Winston also broaden the analysis of the processes of constructions and changes of dynamics and problems. In my view, combining them can provide a theoretical foundation to understand the question addressed here. The concept of *norm cluster* underpin that the norm is a result of the nexus between these three components - problem, value, and behavior - structured logically. This is defined as "a bounded collection of interrelated specific problems, values, and behaviors that are understood to be similar enough that their adopters form a family group" (WINSTON, 2017, p. 647). Thus, it is possible to combine in multiple ways the values and behaviors interconnected, but different, enabling various plausible solutions to similar and interconnected problems (WINSTON, 2017).

Therefore, according to Winston, norms have a unique tripartite conceptual structure, but a dual nature that allows for both continuity and change. The structure of the norm is stable, that is, there will always be three components: problem, value, and behavior; but the problems themselves, values, and stipulated behaviors can be changed through contestation (flexible) offering better choices and greater agency to States that adopt the norm (WINSTON, 2017).

It considers the perspective that the norms have both constitutive and restrictive aspects. Regarding the constitutive aspect, it is understood that the

> [...] create categories of actors and actions, and determine those actors' identities and interests. Norms create meaning through the construction of intersubjective (i.e. collectively held) understandings of who and what things are. This meaning includes whether or not the item in question [...] is valued. (WINSTON, 2017, p. 640).

In this sense, through the attribution of value, which in turn is subjective, given something, it is possible to problematize a social or material fact by verifying that it negatively affects the realization or practice of the valued element (WINSTON, 2017). Thus, the importance of value in identifying the problem that will be addressed by the norm stands out. Regarding the restrictive aspect, it is considered that the

> [...] define "acceptable" justifications for behavior. If a state wishes to pursue a specific behavior to address a defined problem, acceptance by other actors of the legitimacy or appropriateness of that behavior depends on how it is publicly justified. (WINSTON, 2017, p. 640).

In view of this, the justification of a behavior is based on values. The value that indicates the problem also limits the appropriate behaviors to solve it. Therefore, the norm presupposes a problem and includes a value that will dictate the appropriate behavior, thus forming a tripartite logical structure of contemporary norms: "If [problem], [value] Suggests [behavior]". In other words, "a problem inhibits the full enjoyment of a value and necessitates a corrective behavior" (WINSTON, 2017, p. 640-641).

Through the formulation of this conceptual structure of tripartite norms, Winston reconciles the two theoretical branches in studies of normative diffusion. The concept of *norm cluster* apparently manages the agent-structure problem in relation to a single object of study. Therefore, using as a premise the structure of the components and the concept of *norm cluster* allows a more precise understanding of how principle-based action diffuses and evolves in the international system (WINSTON, 2017).

As explained in this conceptualization, something becomes a problem when it affects or constrain a value and this, in turn, requires a behavior. However, this principle-based behavior featuring the norm's implementation, will interact with different relationships presented in a context (as shown by *security clusters* framework), and likely affect that same previous value. In this regard, the specific value being discussed here is human protection. The intention is to understand how the multiple relationships that constitute different types of shared perceptions of threat and interests among states in a *security cluster* affect the

shared human protection value which certain norms has in their *norm cluster* structure. To accomplish this, we will explore the conflict of Mali below, aiming to identify the implementation of norms which has the human protection value and delineate the different relationships present in Mali's *security cluster.*

MINUSMA: PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization

MINUSMA is primarily responsible for supporting the political process and stabilizing the country in the face of the complexity and aggravation of the internal conflict in Mali. Before directly addressing the characteristics of MINUSMA itself, it is necessary to historically contextualize the conflict in Mali.

Mali is situated in the Sahel region, western realm of the African continent, and has numerous ethnic groups, besides the presence of armed groups that made the country a stage of serious political, economic, and social instability (PARENTI, 2020). In addition, Mali had a late independence, ceasing to be a French's colony only in 1960. Among the different ethnic groups in the country, the one that stands out is a nomadic minority group that live pastorally in the northern region of the country called the Tuaregs. They are neglected and marginalized by the government and have a desire for independence of the region and creation of an autonomous state - the Azawad (VELÁSQUEZ, 2014).

As a result of marginalization, the Tuareg groups organized themselves in the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and began a rebellion in February 2012 against the Malian government. This year was a period of great instability because of the intensification of violence and emerging militant Islamic groups in the country. Due to the worsening situation, Mali has requested international aid. In October 2012, the UNSC authorized a joint mission named African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) comprising the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and UN support with the aim of restoring territorial integrity and protecting the civilian population. In January 2013, France deployed Operation Serval at the request of the government itself, to carry out actions against "terrorist and associated elements", whose troops still remain in the country. (GILDER, 2022; PARENTI, 2020).

On 25 April 2013, the UNSC authorized the creation of MINUSMA from 1 July 2013 to stabilize the situation in the country and support the political process, which replaced the AFISMA. The mission mandate authorized the use of all means necessary to protect the mandate itself, the UN forces and associated personnel, as well as the protection of civilians against any form of physical violence (UNSC, 2013). According to Gilder (2022, p. 94), the mission clearly focuses on physical protection.

Considering the authorization of the mandate, this peace operation focuses on Protection of Civilians (PoC) and HR in order to design a safe and peaceful environment for

the return of refugees and realization of elections. Since 1999, the mandates of UN peacekeeping have consistently incorporated the PoC, encompassing three key aspects: dialogue and engagement, physical protection, and the creation of a secure environment (MOE, 2021). The need to protect civilians in armed conflict was gradually accepted in IHL, universalized and codified as PoC. It's arising from the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, became a central obligation of the international community, and was inserted into the agenda of the organization (LILLY, 2022; FRANCIS, POPOVSKI, SAMPFORD, 2012).

The PoC is a historical norm formulated by scholars of military history, politics with specific application since it is aimed at civilian victims of war or internal disturbances. Its origin dates back to the first ethical and religious considerations of just war (FRANCIS, POPOVSKI, SAMPFORD, 2012). The core concern of PoC is the protection of the basic rights of non-combatants, as specified in IHL, from threats caused by large-scale violence. However, there are different types of actors engaged with PoC, for example, the UNSC and Secretariat, peacekeepers, combatants, and humanitarians, which reflect different perspectives and means of this norm. Each of these actors has different capacities and limitations, which it must assimilate with its commitment to protection[12] (BREAKEY, 2012). Applying the *norm cluster* structure in PoC norm is perceptive that the central problem is violence against civilians and the core value is human protection, although there are others (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022, p. 211).

Returning to the conflict of Mali, in short, the crisis was triggered by a major rebellion of Tuareg groups in the north part of the country in favor of the creation of an autonomous state, the Azawad, in 2012 (PARENTI, 2020). The mission aims to help the government re-establish authority and state control in the northern region, so it can be considered biased in supporting the government. There are many actors involved in Mali's conflict such as the government, the Tuareg groups, and the extremist groups which with their intense activity represent the greatest danger to peace and the escalation of ethnic violence since 2016. (PARENTI, 2020).

The conflict in Mali is hostile, complex, and multifaceted since there are also several anti-terrorist forces, including the Joint Regional Task Force of the Five of the Sahel (FC-G5S)[13] and Operation Barkhane (previously Operation Serval) led by the French

[12]In short, consequently, it's generating four distinct concepts of PoC: the primarily negative duties of combatant POC, the role-based responsibilities of peacekeeping PoC, the aspirational and universal concerns of Security Council POC, and the ever-growing toolkit of pacific strategies at work in humanitarian POC (BREAKEY, 2012, p. 57). Amidst these four versions of PoC, the focus is the *peacekeeping* PoC and the *Security Council* PoC that is related to UN peace operations literature, which has legal basis in UN documents as Brahimi Report (2000); mentioned also in a series of reports by the UN Secretary-General to the UNSC; the UNSC resolutions; and the presidential statements. In 1999, the UNSC adopted the first resolution mentioning the PoC, as well as peace operations with PoC mandates and referrals to the ICC (LILLY, 2022).

[13]FC-G5S is a cross-border force deployed in June 2017 to offensively combat terrorism. "At the regional level, the governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger formed the Sahel Group of Five to increase

government, which conducts offensive operations against jihadist groups that also pose a threat to civilians (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022; WEISS and WELZ, 2014). In view of the rise of jihadist groups in Mali linked to global terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State, the reaction of anti-terrorist forces in order to defend the sovereign authority of the government expresses the counterterrorism present in MINUSMA.

"The counter-terrorism norm is built on vague foundations since there is no specific document and/or agreement to draw upon" (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022, p. 214). Even though, according to Zimmerman (2020, p. 130, 143), there are 19 internationals legal instruments related to the prevention of terrorism[14] attacks, which also prohibit it, such as various international conventions, customary laws, and the Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute of ICC. Since 2001, the UN has expanded its involvement in counterterrorism to a significant extent, because “before 2001, the UN General Assembly had produced 12 major conventions on particular types of terrorist activity, [...].[but until] 9/11, only two states (the UK and Botswana) were a party to all these conventions” (BOURNE, 2014, p. 244).

Roughly two weeks following the September 11th, the UNSC adopted the resolution 1373, considered a far-reaching resolution, which mandated states to both sign and ratify these additional conventions and affirmed that any terrorist act constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The resolution, adopted by the UNSC on September 28th, 2001 under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, requires states to criminalize terrorist activities, to freeze the funds and financial assets of terrorists and their supporters, and to deny safe haven to them (UNSC, 2001).

From this landmark were created a dense network of agencies within the UN focused specifically on countering terrorism (ZIMMERMAN, 2020, p. 131). Nevertheless, the term terrorism has not been defined for the UN, leading to a high level of ambiguity (ZIMMERMAN, 2020; BOURNE, 2014). “This lack of definitional clarity has spawned a systemic problem of the misuse of counterterrorism law and practice in domestic legal systems across the globe” (AOLÁIN, 2021). Additionally, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin also highlights the insufficient attention to HR implications on these documents.

However, in 2006, UNGA unanimously adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288), a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counterterrorism. This strategy has four pillars, namely: addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism; preventing and combating terrorism; building States’ counterterrorism capacity; ensuring HR and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism (UNGA, 2006). Since counterterrorism groups safeguard HR and the

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cooperation due to security challenges in the region" (BOUTELLIS, 2015). The UNSC welcomed the FC-G5S in Resolution 2359 and included its formal cooperation with MINUSMA in Resolution 2391.

[14]According to Rapoport (2022), terrorism has historically been characterized by four waves: anarchist, nationalist, marxist, religious.

interventions are based on supporting the government in stabilizing civilization, counterterrorism also embodies a human protection value, as does the PoC. Considering the *norm cluster* structure in Counterterrorism norm, it is possible to frame the problem as the terrorism, and among the values are identified: sovereign authority, HR, and human protection (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022, p. 211).

Going back to the Mali conflict, MINUSMA can be described as being a robust operation, using force to enforce the mandate and, as its name implies, it is a multidimensional stabilization operation. So, the robustness employed is relevant in attempting to establish stability in a particular region, since the protection of the population in their areas of deployment and within existing capacities, would be an immediate priority for the mission.

Stabilization missions are military and civil activities conducted across the spectrum between peace and conflict in countries or regions experiencing conflict or post-conflict situations to establish or maintain order and support for the extension or restoration of state authority (OLIVEIRA, 2020). In addition, these types of missions aim to prevent the reoccurrence of violence and conflicts and may support the development of local institutions and civil society organizations through military means. The mission has taken a 'robust' stand on the use of force to achieve stabilization. As a preventive method of protection, robustness could contribute to human protection by reducing the risks faced by civilians in unstable situations and could be beneficial to human security (GILDER, 2022). Thus, stabilization also has human protection as a value in its normative structure.

In summary, MINUSMA operates in a security environment composed of different actors with different interests and characterized by the implementation of PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization norms concomitantly. This section has argued that these norms share the human protection value in their *norm cluster* structure, but their joint implementation in Mali could end up compromising this same value, as will be explored below.

The dynamic of Mali's *Security Clusters* and the effect on human protection value

This brief description of the particularities of MINUSMA point out the challenging environment characterized for a multifaceted conflict, many actors and multiple relationships, which now we will try to delineate in a table inspired by Unwin's table (2016) on the Islamic States (IS) threat environment. In an attempt to apply the theoretical framework of *security clusters* to an empirical case, we outline some possible examples of *security clusters* in the context of Mali's conflict using as data sources the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and information from the interviews and expert opinions conducted by Louise Wiuff Moe's research (2021).

Table 1 - Mali's *Security Clusters*

Threat	Threatener	Threatened	Protector	Protected	Threat type
1. Terrorist Attacks	Extremist Groups	Individuals (Civilian Population)	FC-G5S, Operation Barkhane, UN Forces, Malian Armed Forces (FAMA)	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Physical violence (mainly fear)
2. Monopoly of legitimate force over the territory	Extremist Groups	Government	FC-G5S, Operation Barkhane, UN Forces, FAMA	Government Sovereign Authority	Territorial Integrity; Ontological (state authority and social stability)
3. UN's Mandate - MINUSMA	Extremist Groups, Civilian Population, Tuareg Groups	UN Forces	Unclear (Anti-terrorist Forces, UN Forces, FAMA)	UN Forces	Physical; Ontological (UN Reputation / MINUSMA)+
4. Recruitment	Network of Extremist Groups	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Government	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Personal
5. State Violence, (Assaults, Murders and Executions)	Government	Tuareg and Arab Rebel Groups (retaliation)	Extremist Groups	Tuareg and Arab Rebel Groups	Physical
6. Contentious Practices (HR abuses and violations)	FC-G5S, Operation Barkhane, UN Forces, FAMA	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Unclear (Armed non-state groups and/or individuals)	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Physical; Psychological Ontological

7. Intercommunal violence	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Armed non-state Groups (Extremist Groups, Tuareg Groups and Individuals)	Individuals (Civilian Population)	Physical; Ontological (Individuals and Government)

Source: elaborated by the author, inspired by Unwin (2016).

On this table, based on the complexity of the security environment defended by Fierke which includes the different relationships between a threat, a threatener, the threatened, the protector and the protected, we have attempted to establish the relationship between the actors in the Mali conflict. Thereby, it maps the different security relationships among various threats to human life in this context, such as: terrorist attacks, State violence, HR abuses and violations, intercommunal violence. It's important to emphasize the predominance of one type of threat: the physical violence, which is the primary focus of MINUSMA.

Moreover, the referent object of security in this framework is equivalent to the threatened, so it can be: individuals - especially civilian population -, the government, the UN forces and the Tuareg groups. So there are different referent objects, but in the current analysis no alternative referent object has been identified. However, we believed that in a deeper research, it might be possible to include an object beyond the state and the individuals.

In this sense, the interaction between the actors involved in the conflict is essential for understanding the dynamics of the operations. According to Louise Wiuff Moe (2021, p. 15), there is a broad alignment of intervention actors in Mali with the interests and powers of the armed forces of states.

> In the Sahel region, such alignment is evident from the prevailing international prioritization of capacity building focused on ‘host governments’’ defense sectors, as well as the growing international reliance on military ‘coalitions of the willing’ formed by state forces from the region, such as the FC-G5S. (MOE, 2021, p. 15).

It complicates the implementation of a solution to violence against civilians, creating challenges for establishing an environment that effectively protects human lives. Regarding the collective well-being of the population, in Mali and the broader Sahel region, there has been a noticeable increase in HR abuses and violations in recent years committed by the states’ armed forces, and by the intervention actors.

> [...] FAMA [Malian Armed Forces] and the FC-G5S have been involved in a continuum of contentious practices; from mobilizing local ‘allied’ groups against alleged ‘insurgent’ groups – a practice playing straight into interethnic violence–, to extrajudicial killings, unlawful arrests as well as forced disappearances of civilians, especially in the context of counterterrorism efforts. (MOE, 2021, p. 16).

These persistent HR abuses also challenge the effective implementation of PoC, as they affect the civilian population physically, psychologically and ontologically, which is organized in the security cluster associated with threat 6 in table 1. The conflict scenario in Mali is so complex that it is worth highlighting that

> The Malian context is shaped by state absence in some areas, state abuses in others, cross-cutting alliances between non-state groups and the state against other groups, as well as intercommunal violence spreading across regions. In this setting of deeply contested order-making, armed groups on the one hand prey upon the population, while they on the other hand act as providers of protection, security and governance.
> [I]n areas of central and northern Mali where the state is largely absent, or where the state has harassed local communities rather than protected them, some perceive extremist groups as an alternative source of protection [...]. (MOE, 2021, p. 19).

Having this in mind, it is possible to identify how positions as a threatener, protector, object or subject of security may vary depending on the area, the moment and the relationship in question. Therefore, this is a scenario of ambiguity and confusion[15]. Based on these reports, we consider the following threats: intercommunal violence and state violence, which affects the human protection value.

Another issue affecting the human protection value is the labeling of indiscriminate armed groups as ‘terrorist’, as this can be easily manipulated according to the interests of the stakeholders. As noted by Moe (2021, p. 19), the labeling of non-state armed groups in Mali as 'terrorists' and the perceived alignment of MINUSMA with such labeling and military actions has negative repercussions for advocacy and conflict resolution work. Labeling them as terrorists undermines the prerequisites for building trust between different groups, which jeopardizes reconciliation initiatives and the resolution of local conflicts (MOE, 2021, p. 19).

The different norms implemented in MINUSMA as PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization which has in their *norm cluster* structure the human protection value as argued in the previous section, may lead to the consideration that their simultaneity may be beneficial, but it is not clear. Both conceptually and in practice, the connection between PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization has granted MINUSMA significant latitude to actively and decisively safeguard civilians. This has also energized the range of potential measures that can be used to ensure the protection of humans. Nevertheless, this interrelationship has led to ambiguity and confusion regarding PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization. With this in mind, we believe it is important to understand how the behavioral expression of these norms interact with their implementation.

A related aspect is how the correlation between PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization ends up prioritizing Stabilization and Counterterrorism objectives over PoC

[15]Another example of this ambiguity is given by Gilder (2022, p. 39): "MINUSMA has expressly supported the Malian government in extending its authority through military means while also supporting a recent peace accord, the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali".

objectives. Higher Stabilization and Counterterrorism objectives limited the conditions for PoC activities focused on dialogue, defense, local conflict resolution, and implementation of the peace agreement (MOE, 2021, p. 19). Another aspect is the effect of these practices on the ground. This includes examining their impact on community perceptions, trust in authorities, and the overall well-being of the population.

In relation to these perceptions and reliance in authorities, according to Moe (2021, p. 17), the UN's impartiality was likely compromised due to increased entanglement between peacekeeping and counterterrorism. MINUSMA, while formally maintaining a distinction from the counterterrorism regime, faces challenges as this distinction is not clearly perceived by the Malian population and the armed groups operating in the country. Moe's report one interview with one MINUSMA staff member that noted

> most us here who are informed and have access to information are sometimes struggling to identify what is our mandate, how shall we operate and what do others do. How can we expect that from people in the village, you know? (MOE, 2021, p. 17).

MINUSMA has operated alongside French troops and the FC-G5S in countering terrorism with the intention to help the Malian government gain a monopoly of legitimate force over its territory (GILDER, 2022, p. 82-83). As reported by Gallagher, Lawrinson and Hunt (2022),

> All the Security Council responses to date can be understood to enshrine the counter-terrorism value of defending and buttressing state sovereignty. The logic underpinning MINUSMA, in particular, is supporting the host state in stabilising the situation, including through the extension of state authority and redeployment of the Malians Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) throughout the country. (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022, p. 224).

Despite the emphasis on terrorist threats to the government, and the cooperation between MINUSMA, FC-G5S and French forces, the UN has made every effort to reiterate that MINUSMA is not a counterterrorism force[16] (GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022). It's important to say that the UN's impartiality does not only affect the reputation of the UN but also changes the conditions for human protection. Recurrently, the UN forces are confused and thrown as a means of retaliation, which makes MINUSMA an operation with a high death rate.

The association between counterterrorism agenda and MINUSMA may be beneficial for population protection, though it could affect or even undermine aspects of human security; such as empowerment and could lead to marginalization, as well as others mission's activities in pursuit of stabilization; such as, inclusive peace and national

[16]"The UN has been at pains to reiterate that MINUSMA is not a counterterrorism force, and it has not engaged in kinetic offensive operations against jihadist groups. It is nevertheless authorized 'to take active steps to anticipate, deter and effectively respond to threats to the civilian population, notably in the North and Center of Mali … [and] … to prevent the return of active armed elements to key population centres and other areas where civilians are at risk, engaging in direct operations pursuant only to serious and credible threats'(presumably including jihadist groups). S/RES/2480, 28 June 2019, para. 28(c)(ii)."(GALLAGHER, LAWRINSON, HUNT, 2022, p. 224).

reconciliation (GILDER, 2022)[17]. According to Gilder's analysis, there are indications that counterterrorism may negatively impact stability. Similarly, Gallagher, Lawrinson, and Hunt (2022, p. 231) argue that the different norms that have the value of human protection have different weights at different points in time, but in the case of Mali, "counter-terrorism plays a more peripheral role, it has a detrimental impact upon POC".

Ensuring the protection of fundamental HR is paramount. The evaluation should assess the adherence of each practice to IHR standards. This involves scrutinizing whether the measures taken respect and protect the basic rights of individuals affected by conflict, maintaining ethical standards in the pursuit of security objectives. According to Di Razza, "the mission's support for and proximity to counterterrorism forces have also affected its ability to use protection strategies based on public human rights monitoring and engagement with armed groups" (DI RAZZA, 2018, p. 2).

The overlap between the norm implementation of PoC, Counterterrorism and Stabilization as seen in the case of Mali affected the value of human protection because it generated a confused about the responsibilities and activities of each of them. This effect, in turn, undermines the concrete protection of civilians in general and highlights the complexities and potential conflicts in implementing these goals.

Final Considerations

The identified Mali's *security clusters*, as outlined in Table 1, underscore the prevalence of physical violence as a primary threat, emphasizing the urgency and importance of the UN's role in protecting civilians. The present paper was designed to highlights some key aspects of the operation in Mali that may affect the shared human protection value, such as the alignment of intervention actors with state interests, coupled with increasing HR violations, and intercommunal violence.

The interaction between these multiple relationships of different *security clusters* as well as the overlapping implementation of PoC, Counterterrorism, and Stabilization norms in MINUSMA raises critical questions about the clarity of responsibilities and activities, leading to confusion on the ground and, consequently, undermining the concrete protection of civilians and thus the human protection value.

The results of this approach strengthen the assumption that the human protection value could be a crucial metric for analyzing the effectiveness of the implementation of UN peace operations. Furthermore, we believe that this analysis could be relevant to understanding the relationship between normative and practical issues of protection of

[17]See also Bruno Charbonneau, 'Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism', vol. 35, n. 4, Journal of Contemporary African Studies, p. 415 - 431, 2017.

people in order to improve both protection policy and practice. It may therefore be helpful in assisting the UN in improving the protection of civilian lives in conflict.

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