FIFTY SOCIOLOGICAL SHADES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY
The case of EU Peacekeeping Policy

Anne Bazin and Charles Tenenbaum (eds) L’Union européenne et la paix

Antoine Rayroux. L’Union européenne et le maintien de la paix en Afrique

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Introduction

A man stands alone in the desert, holding a watermelon under his arm. He is wearing a jellaba and looks into the distance with a guarded expression. What is he waiting for? Behind him, a military vehicle bearing the European Union (EU) flag approaches. What has it come for? Will the encounter between the man and the vehicle take place? This theatrical scene, with something of Waiting for Godot about it, is on the cover of Antoine Rayroux’s book L’Union européenne et le maintien de la paix en Afrique [The European Union and Peacekeeping in Africa]. This book is the result of a political science doctoral thesis written while studying at the University of Montreal and the Free University of Brussels. It was published at the same time as the book L’Union européenne et la paix [The European Union and Peace] edited by Anne Bazin and Charles Tenenbaum, which brings together chiefly French researchers. These two books from the French-speaking world look at the emergence, and subsequent institutionalisation, of the EU as an actor in peacekeeping during the 2000s and 2010s, taking sociological approaches to theories of international relations. The actors, their practices, and the institutional contexts in which they operate are taken seriously.

Was the peacekeeping policy implemented by the EU in Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East shaped by the sum of national practices and usages transferred
from member states, or by practices and usages specific to the EU? Neither. Are the practices and usages of the EU’s military and diplomatic actors similar to or different from those generated in other international contexts, such as the United Nations (UN) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)? Both. The research conducted by Rayroux, and by Bazin, Tenenbaum et al., finds two conclusions in common. On the one hand, the EU’s peacekeeping policy is formulated by a “hybrid collection of national and multilateral practices”. These hybrid practices result from peacekeeping methods that are both inherited from the UN and NATO, and specific to EU actors. On the other hand, the EU’s peacekeeping policy produces a “differentiated dynamic of Europeanisation”. Rayroux and Bazin, Tenenbaum et al. contribute to the study of the varying effects of the EU on the implementation of peacekeeping operations, a continuation of earlier work on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Analysis of the EU’s peacekeeping policy offers an opportunity to discuss the contribution and the ambiguities of sociological approaches to the study of international relations, following on from arguments that underline their heuristic dimension. This review article contributes to recent discussions about the “practice turn” by introducing research by French-speaking scholars who employ sociological approaches that go beyond this “practice turn”. Having discussed the results that focus on the actors’ practices and the institutional contexts within which these emerge, the second part of this article analyses the sociological positions relating to the actors’ roles and the logic behind their actions. These sociological approaches differ in their theoretical and methodological shades. Some of these shades are described in the third part of this article, which leads to a defence of sociological pluralism, in order to avoid the race to claim a monopoly of legitimacy by one sociological approach against, and at the expense of, the rest.

**Hybrid Practices and Institutional Interstices**

The EU’s peacekeeping policy is the result of hybrid practices and usages that were formed where different institutional contexts intersect. These ways of conducting