Preface

On a cold evening in New York in late November 2015, I sat down with Adam,[1] a UN official who had just returned from his posting with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) – a multidimensional UN peacekeeping operation in the West African country of Mali. I'd asked him if he wanted to meet in his office, but he insisted on a coffee shop away from the UN headquarters. Over several espressos, he expressed his frustrations with the mission.

Adam was tasked with creating solutions for communal disputes in Mali, such as disagreements about land ownership, the price of a tradeable commodity, and issues over cattle herding. He was stationed in Bamako, the capital, but struggled to secure permission to travel to the areas in northern and central Mali most affected by these disputes. Taking the hint, I suggested that perhaps Mali might have been better off without MINUSMA. "Absolutely not. Not even close," he responded. MINUSMA peacekeepers, Adam explained, had contained local disputes and ensured that postconflict reconstruction could proceed with relatively few interruptions. He believed the pessimistic assessments of the UN's impact did not consider that alternatives might have led to the collapse of Malian society. Simply put, as badly as things have gone in Mali, it could have been considerably worse if the UN hadn't gotten involved. Little did either of us know at the time that a military dictatorship, having overthrown the democratically elected government of Mali, would force the UN mission out in 2023, proving Adam's assessment correct.

A few months after the coffee with Adam, I took the first of many trips to Mali to find out for myself if he was right. One of the first interviews I conducted was with the MINUSMA Chief of Police Operations, Amadou Camara, at the UN headquarters in downtown Bamako. An hour before the meeting, I received a phone call from the UN's public relations representative informing me that the chief needed to move the meeting to the new police headquarters and that he was going to

[1] I have used pseudonyms for all research participants to preserve their anonymity.

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be late. "How late?" "Late." Undeterred, I followed her GPS directions to the location of the headquarters. After showing my identification at the front gate, I was met by a senior German UN officer who led me to Camara's office, where I waited for him. Chief Camara had plastered his office with wall-to-wall maps of current UN police deployments. Each map had Post-it notes highlighting patrol routes.

Camara entered shortly afterward. A stout and gregarious Senegalese man, he greeted me with a smile. He apologized for his tardiness, explaining that he had just met with some chiefs from nearby tribes to discuss UN police cooperation with traditional authorities. Over the next hour, Camara discussed some of the challenges facing UN police in Mali, interactions with locals, and police patrolling strategies in Bamako and beyond. His understanding of local communal disputes and apparent dedication to preventing the disputes from escalating struck me as unusual, especially for a high-level officer. After the meeting, a younger Senegalese man – one of Camara's deputies – walked me to my car outside the main gate. "Do you meet with traditional leaders about disputes often?" I asked him, inspired by the conversation in the chief's office. "Every week," he replied.

This book investigates the connection between UN peacekeeping and communal violence. Is Adam right that the UN prevents the outbreak of violence? Are patrols conducted by Camara and his colleagues in peacekeeping operations around the globe effective? If so, why? Are some types of peacekeepers better than others? What can we learn from their successes and failures? *Local Peace, International Builders* explores the answers to these questions.

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