We live in a world in which the international community aspires to protect and promote the quality of human life. To do so often requires the exercise of control over the very individuals, societies, states, and peoples that are the objects of concern. In other words, power is a prominent feature of a global ethics of care. This book examines paternalism beyond borders from the nineteenth century to the present, and in everyday practices of humanitarianism, human rights, development, and other projects designed to improve the lives of others. It offers a provocative look at the subtle and variable ways that power works its way in and through global ethics, and considers whether and when paternalism might be justified.

indirect mechanisms of international institutions. They both reject the paternalism of direct responsibility as well as the idea that the West does not have the responsibility to act on the problems of non-Western states. In both these frameworks, Western wealth and power – the fact that Western states and institutions set the international agenda and shape the possibilities for the progress and development of non-Western states – are used to argue that there is an indirect responsibility for the outcomes in non-Western states and societies. The key point is that this form of new paternalist responsibility operates as a form of self-critique and as a technology of self-governance. On the basis of concerns with democracy, development, and human rights, international regimes extend not only in terms of their indirect impact on non-Western states but also in the construction of new regimes of transparency and ethical codes, monitoring and regulating a broad swath of international actors and their activities.

Implicit in the ontological understanding of associational responsibility is also a license to “interfere” or to “enlighten” the private choice making of Western citizens, often seen to lack the required reflexivity in their lack of understanding of their own complicity in, and responsibility for, these problems. New paternalism works on the basis of generating awareness of indirect connections and consequences and thus relies not merely on the generation of information, research, and transparency in order for citizens and other actors to reflect upon their choices and actions, but also depends on the inculcation of a community of ethico-political activists, advocates, and researchers. In this way, new paternalism builds a new political constituency and a new political discourse based upon a consensus that becoming aware of the problems of others enables us to govern ourselves on the basis of both political responsibility and ethical responsibility. While critiquing traditional forms of paternalism, it inculcates and generalizes a paternalist sensitivity as a technique of the governance of the self.
Paternalism and Peacebuilding: Capacity, Knowledge, and Resistance in International Intervention

SÉVERINE AUTESSERRE

A European diplomat once explained to me the logic behind his government's approach to the Democratic Republic of Congo: "It is a bit like with a teenager – someone who is 18 or 20; you want to help them, but you have to mind your manners and build the trust that enables you to do so." Indeed, the diplomat and his international colleagues – other diplomats, African Union and UN officials, and members of NGOs – all wanted to help a much-affected population by facilitating the re-establishment of peace on Congolese territory. However, not only did these foreign interveners regularly forget to "mind their manners and build trust," but their perception that Congo was like an adolescent who needed to be manipulated into accepting assistance often precluded them from treating the Congolese people as equal partners in the peace process. When the United Nations elaborated a plan to stabilize eastern Congo in 2008, for instance, its expatriate staff designed the strategy without actually involving national or local representatives in the drafting process. The implementation of this initiative suffered multiple setbacks, as well as considerable resistance from local authorities and communities, but UN officials still neglected to invite Congolese stakeholders to participate in the meetings devoted to discussing and revising the stabilization strategy. It took three years for the United Nations to finally do so.¹

This mode of operation is not limited to Congo. According to several interviewees, there was a similar situation in Timor-Leste for several years after the 2006 riots. International interveners met on a

¹ This anecdote is based on the author's confidential interviews and field observations in Congo between June 2010 and July 2011.

I am grateful to Michael N. Barnett, Chuck Call, two anonymous reviewers, and the other contributors to this volume for their very helpful feedback. I also thank Erik Lin-Greenberg, Antonia Miller, Meena Roldan Oberdick, Alexandra Russo, and Stephanie Schwartz for their excellent research assistance.
bi-weekly basis in the UN compound. There, they planned the future of the country without communicating with, or involving, any local partners. A Kosovar government official and a Sri Lankan civil society leader deplored similar phenomena in their own countries, where international actors coordinated among themselves without inviting any members of the host population.

What all of these anecdotes have in common is that they show international interveners acting with the best of intentions—to improve the welfare of others by re-establishing peace in conflict zones—but without the input or consent of the intended beneficiaries. In other words, they are textbook examples of international paternalism as defined by Michael N. Barnett in the Introduction to this volume, and of “soft paternalism” as analyzed by Didier Fassin in Chapter 2. Importantly, these actions are often perceived as such by the intended beneficiaries of international efforts, not only in Congo, Timor-Leste, or Kosovo, but also in many other conflict zones. Time and again, across all of my field sites, I, along with other researchers, heard the same kind of criticisms levied against interveners: Our local interviewees would complain that international peacebuilders were “arrogant,” “descending,” and “paternalistic.”

These stories underscore a tension that recurs throughout theaters of intervention between the discourse and the practice of international peacebuilding. That is, the values that interveners claim to have and the theories of effective peacebuilding that they aim to follow are at odds with actual practice on the ground. “Consent” is supposed to be a prerequisite for any kind of UN engagement in conflict zones, but local people regularly complain that UN initiatives are imposed on them. Scholars and practitioners routinely emphasize that solutions fostered domestically are much more likely to be effective and sustainable than arrangements that are externally dictated, but the latter prevail in many conflict zones. Why do interveners continually behave in ways that conflict with their own values and discourses? How do they justify their own imposition? How does domination interact with compassion in international peacebuilding?

An interview I conducted with Ben Larke, a peacebuilder with twelve years of experience working for a variety of UN agencies and NGOs in Timor-Leste, illuminates the process through which interveners come to adopt a series of behaviors and attitudes that differ from and, at times, oppose the ones they aim for. No matter how hard Larke and his colleagues tried to use “the most empowering methodologies,” the “classic, almost paternalist thinking” that permeates aid efforts “crept into the psychology of everyone.” To Larke, this patronizing attitude was rooted in the very fact that he and his colleagues were “brought

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2 A non-confidential source for this anecdote is the author's on-record interview with Ben Larke, Dili, Timor-Leste, February 2012.


4 Henry Richardson would argue that these actions are “only in the ballpark of paternalism,” as they are not solely justified on the basis of the intervenees’ good (see Chapter 1 in this volume). Ilana Feldman presents a convincing rebuttal—and develops an argument very close to the approach I use in this chapter—in the introduction to Chapter 9.


8 Author’s on-record interview, Dili, February 2012.
in from the outside with the idea that [they were] here to help – that people [were] needy and lack[ed] capacity."

My own findings confirm Larke's analysis. As the first section of this chapter explains, two main elements are at the root of the paternalistic attitudes that recur in international peacebuilding: first, the idea that local populations need help because they lack capacity and expertise, and second, the belief that international actors have the capacity and the knowledge required to provide this help. The next section of this chapter locates the source of these two recurrent narratives in the politics of knowledge at work in international peacebuilding and clarifies how this politics of knowledge legitimizes international interference. The third section identifies the most important on-the-ground consequences of such a paternalistic approach: the fact that host populations regularly resist, challenge, or reject the international programs that are meant to help them. Throughout, I note exceptions to the dominant practices and highlight the benefits inherent to these alternative approaches. By way of conclusion, the last section identifies the three main obstacles to changing and ending these widespread practices: the role of accountability structures, the dilemma that international interveners face in balancing the inclusion of local actors with the hurdles that such inclusion often creates, and the detrimental byproducts of the politics of knowledge at work in the peacebuilding field.9

This chapter underscores two points that are critical for this volume. First, in international peacebuilding, paternalism manifests itself in the process, rather than the goals, of intervention. Second, both “Western” and “non-Western” actors use the everyday practices, routines, and narratives I analyze. In other words, in contrast to John Hobson who argues that international paternalism is but an extension of Western liberal imperialism, I maintain that African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American interveners engage in the everyday paternalism I describe just as much as European and North American peacebuilders.10

I develop this argument based on several years of ethnographic inquiry in conflict zones around the world. I spent these years embedded in the transnational community of expatriates who devote their lives to building peace in foreign countries. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, these individuals have extremely varied geographical origins, professions, and organizational affiliations, but they all inhabit a metaphorical world with specific customs, rituals, cultures, structures, beliefs, and taboos – a world that I call “Peaceland.”11 At times I studied Peaceland from the inside, as a fellow intervener, and, other times, from the outside, as an academic researcher.

I base my analysis on more than 640 in-depth interviews as well as three and a half years of field observations, most of which offered extensive participant observation opportunities. I collected this data primarily in Congo (where I traveled regularly between 2001 and 2014), but I also draw on research visits to other theaters of intervention, including Afghanistan (in 2002), Burundi (during several visits between 2003 and 2012), Cyprus (in 2011), Israel and the Palestinian Territories (in 2012), Kosovo (in 2000), Nicaragua (in 1998), South Sudan (in 2011), and Timor-Leste (in 2012). In addition, I build on participant observations and interviews conducted in the New York headquarters of various international and non-governmental organizations as well as interviews in African, European, and North American capitals (between 1999 and 2015).12

Insiders’ and Outsiders’ Capacity: The Dominant Narratives

The first source of the interveners’ paternalistic attitudes is the view that intended beneficiaries lack the capacity and expertise necessary to solve their own predicaments – which justifies the need for foreigners

9 The analysis presented in the subsequent sections extensively draws on – and at times reproduces – the arguments formulated in Autesserre, Peaceland. For more details and examples on the analysis presented in the first and last section, see Peaceland, ch. 6; the second section, see Peaceland, part 1, notably ch. 2; and the third section, see Peaceland, ch. 3.

10 See Chapter 3 in this volume.

11 Autesserre, Peaceland.

12 Virtually all of my interviewees and contacts asked to remain anonymous due to the personal and professional risks involved in providing information for this chapter. They also requested that I maintain the same level of confidentiality for all the material gathered through field and participant observations. For this reason, I cite in full only that data which I obtained through on-record interviews and from public sources. All of the information and quotations for which I do not provide complete references come from confidential interviews, participant observations, and field observations. To ensure their reliability, I have triangulated all the statements that I make in this chapter, including those that I could not fully reference.
to help host populations. A few vignettes from my fieldwork will illustrate how this view plays out on the ground.

A French NGO intervener deployed in eastern Congo explained to me that leaders in the country are unreliable—"state structures are very weak," "there is a lot of poor governance," and authorities must strike shady deals just to survive—"so only the ... foreigners are capable of enacting reforms." I heard these kinds of pejorative statements about Congolese populations and authorities from interveners of all national, professional, and organizational backgrounds. Many interviewees—including African contacts—deemed local and national authorities incompetent, uneducated, corrupt, dishonest, insensitive to the sufferings of their populations, and incapable of long-term planning. In addition, some of them described the Congolese people as poorly educated, lazy, self-centered, violent, or untrustworthy; these negative perceptions also extended to Congolese associations and civil society organizations. 13

In all of the conflict zones in which I worked, certain foreign peacebuilders expressed some form of this same dismissive attitude. Some interveners painted the South Sudanese people as lazy, inept, hopeless, and aggressive, while others branded Timorese nationals as backward, corrupt, and incompetent. Such derogatory comments were also widespread in Afghanistan, Burundi, and Nicaragua; my contacts described the same phenomenon in Albania, Azerbaijan, Chad, and Rwanda; a fellow researcher observed it in Liberia; and Ilana Feldman's chapter in this volume includes similar examples from the Palestinian Territories. 14 Admittedly, expatriates and immigrant communities often criticize the citizens of the foreign countries in which they live, whether in America, Europe, or Africa. However, criticisms are particularly harsh and widespread among interveners deployed in conflict zones, regardless of these individuals' geographic origins, professions, or organizational affiliations.

That international peacebuilders come to belittle their intended beneficiaries so pervasively is puzzling given the blatant contradiction between such attitudes and the values to which the vast majority of interveners claim to subscribe. The behavior surprises—and distresses—even the individuals who themselves engage in it. During a party I attended with other interveners in eastern Congo, a friend of mine went on a lengthy rant about how he could not stand the local people anymore. After a while, he paused, became very sad, and remarked on how he had changed in the year that he had spent in the field. All his ideals of equality, respect, and fairness had crumbled. He had become the very kind of person he used to hate. Only leaving the intervention world, he thought, would enable him to return to normal.

Not all interveners who engage in such self-reflection decide to change careers. Most of them, instead, try to fight the dominant discourse. In each of my field sites, I met expatriates who contested the dominant narratives and tried to rein in these types of careless comments. They reminded their colleagues that blanket statements about entire populations were bound to do injustice to many people. They pointed to the numerous local individuals they knew who defied the stereotypes and who had proved competent, intelligent, selfless, reliable, honest, hardworking, and fully dedicated to bettering the lives of their fellow citizens. They emphasized that despite the failings of state structures, many of their local counterparts had knowledge, expertise, and skills essential to peacebuilding. However, at best, these interveners were able to prevent one conversation or another from getting out of hand. They rarely managed to improve the overall image of local people.

The flipside of this discourse, which holds that host populations lack capacity and expertise, is the assumption that interveners have the knowledge necessary to compensate for local deficiencies—as I further explain in the next section. Together, these two narratives justify international imposition. This is evident in Aisling Swaine's analysis of the nexus between humanitarian agencies' perceptions of Darfuri women as utterly powerless and their exclusion from decision-making. 15 The words of a development worker I interviewed similarly encapsulate this dynamic. For over seventeen years, this expatriate had seen thousands of peacebuilders arrive in the city of Goma (eastern Congo). She explained that, although there are exceptions, the general perspective of interveners in crisis situations is that "these poor,

13 See also Gabrielle Dietze, "Mythologies Blanches: Découvreurs et Sauveurs du Congo," in Repenser l'Indépendance: La RD Congo 50 Ans Plus Tard, ed. Pole Institute, Regards Croisés (Goma, DR Congo: Pole Institute, 2010).


15 See Chapter 6 in this volume.
helpless, catastrophic people need our expertise," so "we will do this for [them]." As people who live in conflict and post-conflict settings are in situations of extreme vulnerability and in need of help, "almost automatically there is [a] power imbalance." Owing to this attitude, foreign peacebuilders "totally disregard capacities already here on the ground." She concluded, "It is like 'these people have no power, so they have no voice'."

Main Source of Paternalism in Peace Interventions: The Politics of Knowledge

Thematic and Local Expertise

The idea that outsiders have the capacity that host populations lack is rooted in the politics of knowledge that characterizes international peacebuilding. In short, there is an ongoing dispute over which (and whose) knowledge matters most for effective peacebuilding. There are two principal contenders for this title. The first, which I refer to as either "local knowledge" or "country expertise," is based on a strong familiarity with specific places, whether countries, like Congo, or sub-national areas, like districts or villages. The second is a category that I call "thematic knowledge" or "technical expertise," and it relies on an in-depth understanding of particular aspects of intervention work. These may be general aspects, such as conflict resolution, development, or humanitarian aid, or they may be specialized ones, as in project management, public finance, or agricultural engineering. Both expatriate and local actors possess each type of knowledge to varying degrees, and they employ various strategies to demonstrate the importance of their particular expertise.

As other researchers have demonstrated, to be effective, peace interventions must draw on the local and thematic knowledge of both insiders and outsiders. Whether they are local stakeholders with thematic knowledge, expatriates with country knowledge, or vice versa, peace-builders with various competencies each contribute different "perspectives, networks, assets, and leverage with particular constituencies," all of which are essential to peacebuilding. These various intervener make the greatest contributions to peace when they work together, each challenging the biases of the other.

Unfortunately, a clear imbalance exists in the current international system. Just like Aisling Swaine has documented for humanitarian aid, the professionalization of the peacebuilding field has led to "the genesis of high-end knowledge which lends authority to the external experts vis-à-vis the knowledge of the 'local' person." In peacebuilding, the most valued expertise is that of foreign intervener who are trained in conflict-resolution techniques and who have extensive experience in a variety of conflict zones. By contrast, and although there are exceptions, country knowledge is much less valued, and the knowledge of local people is usually trivialized.

Recruitment practices embody the valorization of thematic expertise over local knowledge. The "career" pages of non-governmental and international organizations' websites show that peacebuilding organizations recruit operational experts, such as "Civil Affairs Officer," "Financial Controller," or "Election Specialist." They rarely hire anthropologists, historians, or other kinds of country-experts who can help intervener gain an in-depth understanding of their work environments, and they virtually never ask for a specialist on, for example,


17 Anderson and Olson, Confronting War, 35.

18 Ibid., 42.

19 See Chapter 6 in this volume, citation from p. 221. On the professionalization of peacebuilding, see Autesserre, Peaceland, 75–9.


Sudan or the Baucau district of Timor-Leste. Foreign ministries and diplomatic missions similarly privilege thematic expertise over local knowledge in the recruitment of their staff. 22

As always, there are variations and exceptions to this trend. Some recruiters value local expertise more than others. In contexts like Afghanistan and the Palestinian Territories, country specialists have had more success in demonstrating the relevance of their knowledge to the overall intervention. This adjustment of knowledge hierarchies was evident in the comparatively larger proportion of expatriates I met whom had been hired based on their pre-existing familiarity with the area. However, even in such theaters of intervention, my contacts confirmed that peacebuilding agencies still prioritized thematic expertise over local knowledge in the recruitment and promotion of their employees.

This predilection for thematic knowledge has numerous consequences for international efforts, which I have analyzed elsewhere. 23 Most relevant for this chapter is that it legitimizes outside interference and leads to an outsider bias.

**Legitimization of Outside Interference**

Valuing thematic expertise over local knowledge justifies the interveners’ claim that they have the capacity necessary to resolve the host populations’ problems. Foreign peacebuilders have technical expertise, which is often attested by degrees from prestigious universities and reinforced by work experience in multiple conflict zones— all of which local counterparts rarely possess.

As a result, in virtually all aid and peacebuilding agencies, whether diplomatic, international, or non-governmental, expatriates hold the management positions, while local employees serve as staff. Very few local people make it into leadership positions in their countries of origin. To move up in the hierarchy, they have to go abroad and become expatriates themselves. In fact, most intervention structures value the expertise of local people only at the level of implementation, if at all. 24 An agency may recruit a local staff member familiar with a specific theater in order to facilitate the execution of given strategies and projects, but it will not involve this person in the design of these initiatives. Similarly, as various interviewees and I experienced in UN agencies, diplomatic missions, and international NGOs, the role of the national staff is usually limited to collecting information that expatriates later analyze. Very few agencies build on local analytical capacity. This unequal relationship also prevails in the interactions between international and local NGOs, as the latter are “rarely” involved “in shaping strategy.” 25

There are only a few exceptions to this widespread practice: isolated efforts by select individuals, project staff (notably those working on community-driven reconstruction initiatives), and organizations (such as Caritas; Peace Direct; Catholic Relief Services in Bosnia, Serbia, and Timor-Leste; the Life and Peace Institute in Congo; and the Eastern Congo Initiative). 26 The common characteristic of these otherwise diverse people and organizations is that they base their actions on in-depth local knowledge and reject universal approaches to peacebuilding. The most innovative among them rely on local employees supervised by a few foreigners (who often have extensive pre-existing country knowledge). In these exceptional cases, local staff and counterparts are in charge of conceiving, designing, and executing the projects. The expatriates view their roles as “providing technical support, resources, and international connections” to the plans formulated by the local stakeholders. 27

Apart from these exceptions, the marginalization of local input is widespread. While interveners often bemoan the lack of participation

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23 _Autesserre, Peaceland_, Part I.

24 For a public source on this issue in Liberia and Sudan, see Sending, _Learning to Build a Sustainable Peace_, 5, 24–5, 28–9, and 31–4; and on the Palestinian Territories, see Chapter 9 in this volume.


27 Gagnon, “Catholic Relief Services,” 172.
and "buy-in" by local populations, they cannot, or do not, locate its source in their own practices. Tellingly, several interveners emphasized that "we cannot pacify Congo" (or Sudan, or Burundi) without the Congolese (or the Sudanese, or the Burundians), since "they are the ones who have the solution." To anyone outside of Peaceland, such a remark would have sounded like a truism. My interviewees, however, presented this argument as a profound conclusion born out of their long experience in conflict zones. To me, their statements highlighted just how ingrained paternalism is in the everyday practice of peacebuilding.

The dominance of thematic expertise does not solely influence power relationships within peacebuilding organizations; it also shapes the overall structure of an intervention. It generates an outsider bias, as Dennis Tull and Pierre Englebert trace in their study of state reconstruction in Africa. They convincingly demonstrate that "the very nature of international reconstruction efforts suggests that the knowledge, capacity, strategies, and resources of external actors are crucial ingredients for success."\(^{28}\)

Combined with the negative view of local counterparts detailed earlier in this chapter, this pro-outsider bias entices international interveners to substitute themselves for local partners and, at times, to act without their consent. Aisling Swaine documents this problem with regards to emergency relief efforts,\(^{29}\) and my contacts provided numerous examples from peacebuilding organizations. They told of expatriates fighting against injustice themselves instead of training grassroots activists to do so, drawing up action plans for elections themselves instead of letting opposition leaders design their own electoral strategies, or carrying out state reconstruction projects themselves without consulting state authorities. In conclusion, one of these interviewees offered a striking remark: "With all their self-confidence, [interveners] think that they can construct the Congo without the Congolese."\(^{30}\)

There were exceptions within all organizations – people who tried, at their own level, to value country knowledge and local expertise

\(^{28}\) Englebert and Tull, "Postconflict Resolution in Africa," citation from pp. 134–5, demonstration throughout the article.

\(^{29}\) See Chapter 6 in this volume.

\(^{30}\) Author's on-record interview with Onesphore Sematumba, Pole Institute, Goma, November 2010.

and to give their local partners as much responsibility as possible. However, these individuals all emphasized the rarity of their approach. Although other expatriates were aware of the problems inherent in their tendency to substitute themselves for their local partners, they explained that the low capacity and potential biases of these counterparts left them with little choice. My contacts stationed in states with weak capacities, such as Congo and Sudan, presented their dilemma as a catch-22: Either they did capacity building, which took an enormous amount of time and resulted in poorly executed programs – while intended beneficiaries continued to suffer from the continuation of violence in the meantime – or they imposed ideas and implemented the initiatives themselves, which was more effective in the short term but unsustainable in the long term. Throughout conflict zones, foreign peacebuilders also worried that, if they relied too much on local input, local stakeholders would manipulate the projects and bias them in favor of their political or ethnic groups. By contrast, foreign interveners viewed themselves as objective parties able to implement impartial programs that would maximize benefits for all stakeholders.\(^{31}\)

As a result, the outsider bias persists, and it creates some of the most significant problems for international peacebuilding: accusations of arrogance, local feelings of imposition, and, in consequence, resistance to and rejection of international programs.

Main Consequences: Adaptation, Contestation, and Resistance

Existing research has shown that, in every country, elite and ordinary citizens interact with interveners through a wide variety of strategies, which reflect the host populations' infinitude of goals, beliefs, customs, and attitudes.\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) See also Anderson and Olson, Confronting War, 32. For illustrations of this self-perception, see the websites and charters of international peacebuilding agencies – for instance, the principles of UN Peacekeeping as presented on the UN website, www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/principles.html#impartiality.

initiatives depend on the given project as well as the country, province, or village in which it takes place. Nevertheless, common patterns recur throughout areas of intervention. Some actors, varying in number depending on the context, cooperate with certain aspects of the intervention, either because they believe in the programs or because they use the international initiatives to reach their own goals. In many cases, however, local reactions to peace interventions also include much less supportive responses such as non-engagement, subversion, contestation, cherry-picking, outright resistance, and rejection.33

Other scholars have identified multiple reasons for these less supportive responses, including the local partners’ poor understanding of international strategies, the presence of vested interests, the impact of financial and logistical constraints on the projects, and the Western and liberal characters of the programs.34 Local interviewees also often complained that, because foreign peacebuilders ignored local expertise and input, interveners implemented programs ill-adapted to local situations – programs that occasionally worsened local conditions and that intended beneficiaries had to combat.35 My research suggests an additional factor, which can be even more influential than the factors cited in existing literature, and which brings us back to the topic of international paternalism. In my analysis, the varying degrees of non-acceptance are due to the very act of imposition.

As one Congolese intellectual described:


34 See the sources listed in footnote 32.

35 Other authors who have also documented this issue include, among many others: Anderson et al., Time to Listen, 24–5, 28, 31, and ch. 5; Tanja Hohe, “Clash of Paradigms: International Administration and Local Political Legitimacy in East Timor,” Contemporary Southeast Asia 24, 3 (2002); Mac Ginty, No War, No Peace; Roland Paris, At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” Review of International Studies 36, 2 (2010); and Pouligny, Ils Nous Avaient Promis la Paix, especially 133–6 and 293.

The programs are often good, if you read the documents from the UN and all the others – at the core they have good intentions. That is not the problem, really. The problem is the bad set-up; things are badly set up from the start, so they cannot work. People here, the supposed beneficiaries, are not consulted; they do not participate in anything. When [interveners design] a project, it is as if it fell on the heads of people here.36

This quote reflects what I heard throughout my interviews with all kinds of Congolese people. Local employees of international agencies explained that they felt excluded from the decision-making process within their organizations. Intellectuals and authorities regularly complained that interveners tried to impose their ideas, values, and standard operating procedures with no consideration of local knowledge and customs. All of these local actors deplored their lack of influence over international strategies. Some of them overlooked these problems in order to benefit from the resources that interveners might provide (such as a steady salary or access to international networks), but others instead reacted by generating obstacles to the implementation of the international programs. For instance, local staff and partners dragged their feet by canceling meetings, forgetting to attend them, or creating state structures for the sole purpose of pleasing international donors but then never using them. Interviewees recalled witnessing similar dynamics in Burundi, the Palestinian Territories, and South Sudan. A former government official complained about interveners arriving with external systems and ideas that disregarded existing Burundian ones; he explained that this practice led to “revolt” by local people, either through violence or through “a certain lack of discipline.”37 An American attorney working in the Palestinian Territories explained how her counterparts would listen to what she said, and then “do things their own way, ignoring the instructions or advice with which they disagreed.” As her Palestinian colleagues themselves confirmed, they thought, “how dare she tell [them] what to do” in their own country, of which she knew nothing. Ilana Feldman’s chapter on aid in the Palestinian Territories emphasizes a similar point.38

36 Author’s on-record interview with Jean-Pierre Lindiro Kabirigi, Pole Institute, Goma, July 2011.

37 Author’s on-record interview with Jean-Marie Ngendahayo, August 2010, Bujumbura.

38 See Chapter 9 in this volume.
In her analysis, one of the main reasons why refugees might refuse aid is the United Nations' attitude towards them. As Feldman explains, all these refugees' demands were about respect and engagement, about the fact that they had the capacity to know what they wanted and needed. Likewise, a Sudanese civil society activist reported that "friction between the donor's perception of how things should look and the communities' perceptions" resulted in various local communities "reject[ing] the intervention," saying "to hell with their money." 39 Or, as Aisling Swaine documents in her chapter, intended beneficiaries would openly criticize international agencies and request a change of strategy. Alternatively, my Sudanese interviewee explained, communities "abandoned the project, worked against [it] by creating lots of obstacles," or simply let it collapse when the donor left. He concluded that "this is why some projects fail: because communities have never owned them, they were always owned by donors. ... It is very common."

Andrea Talentino reports a finding analogous to mine. 40 Through an in-depth study of local perceptions of eleven ongoing peace operations, Talentino demonstrates that "actors resist change, even when they might objectively agree that it is positive, if it seems forced upon them." 41 In all of her cases, even those where interveners were initially welcome (like in Kosovo and Liberia), she documents resentment at the imposition from at least some local groups – whether they were spoilers, elites, citizens, social groups, or a combination thereof. 42 Just like I have argued, Talentino also shows that this resentment results in pervasive obstructionism. Reyko Huang and Joseph Harris's analysis of capacity building by UN officials in Timor-Leste underscores a similar point. Expatriates making "direct or indirect attempts to impose" their ideas on national staff were met with "frowning and resistance," which compromised peacebuilding efforts. 43

39 Author's on-record interview with Edmund Yakani, Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, Juba, April 2011.
40 Talentino, "Perceptions of Peacebuilding."
42 Talentino, "Perceptions of Peacebuilding," 161, especially Table 2.

Interestingly for the debate on paternalism, these local reactions rarely take the form of open, obvious contestation or outright rejection. Instead, the large majority are subtle attempts at resisting without antagonizing international actors or causing them to leave. Numerous contacts noted that, in most theaters of intervention, whether due to poverty or low state capacity, local stakeholders have so few resources – financial, logistic, or otherwise – to accomplish their goals that they rely on outside help to obtain the material assets needed to complete their work. A Filipino city official and a Kenyan peacebuilder used the same words to describe the resulting dynamics: "beggars cannot be choosers." 44 In Haiti, for instance, the government has to comply with donors' conditions and suggestions because that is the only way it can get the financial resources it needs to govern. 45 Similarly, in Congo, the needs are so high that Congolese officials told me they "have to agree to anything" in the hope that it might "get [them] out of the ditch." 46 Interveners can thus – in the words of one of them – "set any kind of unreasonable rule [they] feel like" and impose the projects they want on their local counterparts. To make matters worse, the international peacebuilders deployed on the ground – those who meet regularly with local actors and set these seemingly unreasonable rules – are often individuals in their twenties or thirties. 47 The mere act of such young people arriving to advise seasoned, usually much older and much more experienced, ministers is inherently paternalistic – something that the interveners are often aware of and uncomfortable with. But again, most local elites will defer to these outsiders so as not to offend the people who can influence the distribution of material assets. Young interveners therefore feel that their advice is welcomed and their knowledge valued.

These various dynamics create a vicious cycle. Local appeals for assistance weaken the position of local elites and strengthen that of the intervening organizations, which then perceive themselves to be...
taking on the core responsibilities of the state and civil society and, as a result, operate with increasing arrogance. Local NGOs and authorities often respond by behaving deferentially toward representatives of these organizations in an attempt to secure their financial, logistical, and political support. To obtain funding, even the strongest and most respected civil society organizations regularly allow outsiders to set their agenda, rather than challenging international interveners on what they see as the country's priorities. Such conduct further undermines the authority of local stakeholders and fuels the interveners' beliefs that they know more than their local counterparts, which in turn reinforces the international tendency to value external knowledge over local input. At the same time, the increased arrogance and tendency toward imposition leads to amplified, but often covert, opposition. As a result, the interveners think that the beneficiaries consent to their projects, while these beneficiaries are instead engaging in passive or concealed resistance. The dissonance was clear in interviews I conducted with local and foreign actors working on the same initiative: In numerous cases, the interveners would explain that they had full cooperation from their partners or staff, while the staff complained of what they perceived as paternalistic behavior on the part of the expatriates, and then went on to explain how they adapted, distorted, or created problems for the international efforts.

In contrast, the exceptional individuals and organizations who fight the trends documented in this chapter, involve local stakeholders in the design of the international programs, build on local knowledge, and solicit local input throughout the course of the project face fewer of the obstacles analyzed in this section and eventually achieve much greater success. Extensive research by Mary Anderson and her co-authors in twenty-one conflict zones around the world found that "when people participate in all phases of an aid effort, from conception of the idea, to the design and planning, to implementation, and through final evaluation, they will 'own' the process and therefore be more likely to maintain the results." A quantitative analysis of local involvement and international reconstruction efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina (from 1991 to 1995) and Somalia (from 1987 to 1997) substantiated this evidence. The study found that "phases of local involvement tend[ed] to be associated with escalating violence." Local communities in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Thailand, and Zimbabwe told similar stories: They worked harder to ensure that a project succeeded and persisted when they viewed it as "theirs," while they did not "put [in] as much effort" when they perceived it as a donor's or NGO's initiative.

Adam Moore reached a similar finding in his analysis of the United Nations' and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's peacebuilding efforts in the Brčko district of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The differing success of two consecutive international attempts at integrating schools in post-war Brčko illustrates the importance of soliciting and integrating local input, as well as the problems that occur when interveners fail to do so. The first initiative occurred in 2000 "with little input from district officials or public discussion with concerned parents." It generated "massive protests" that "resulted in the temporary closure of the schools until changes were reversed." The second attempt took place a year later. It started with extensive consultations of district citizens, teachers, and officials, to discuss their concerns and gain their support for the proposed change. The subsequent implementation of the reform proceeded smoothly with minimal incidents or public protest. Beyond school integration, international staff based in Brčko worked on a daily basis with their local counterparts and took their suggestions into account. In Moore's analysis, the cultivation of local officials as partners in the peacebuilding process was one of the reasons for the success of reforms in this district, while efforts in the rest of the country widely failed.

51 This paragraph is based on -- and the quotations come from -- Adam Moore, The Dynamics of Peacebuilding Success and Failure in Post-War Bosnia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 122–4.
52 Ibid.
Conclusion: Obstacles to Change

Two main elements are at the source of the paternalistic attitudes and behaviors that international peacebuilders routinely adopt when working on the ground in conflict zones. The first is the claim that host populations lack the capacity to resolve their own predicaments, and the second is the belief that international interveners possess this capacity. Both narratives are rooted in the politics of knowledge at work in the peacebuilding field, where thematic expertise is much more valued than country or local knowledge. The paternalistic attitudes and behaviors, when added to the narratives that justify them, antagonize host populations and generate widespread resistance and rejection, creating significant obstacles for the international programs.

Paternalism is thus embedded both in the everyday practice of intervention on the ground and in the very nature of the international peacebuilding system. As Ilana Feldman also emphasizes in her chapter, it is from the moment that we identify a population or a person as needing help that the dangers of paternalism first appear. This moment, when interpreted through the dominant international peacebuilding lens, divides people into helpers (those experts who are brought in from the outside because they have the required knowledge and capacities) and those in need of help (those non-experts who are on site and lack capacity). From then on, there is a risk that paternalism may color any and all interactions between interveners and host populations.

Thankfully, there are exceptions to common paternalistic practices. The experiences of these exceptional individuals and organizations show both that another way of conducting international peacebuilding is possible and that these alternative approaches promote greater intervention success. They demonstrate that paternalism is not overdetermined by the structure of the international peacebuilding system, no matter how ingrained it is in practice. Each interner can contest the narratives and practices dominant among his or her colleagues, and in doing so, each of these individuals can challenge the structure of the overall system.

In fact, even among the foreign interveners who follow the dominant modes of operation, many individuals are aware that imposition and the resulting lack of local buy-in to the international programs are problematic. These people and their agencies have therefore tried to take steps to mitigate these issues. "Local ownership" is now a buzzword in development and peacebuilding circles, and interveners regularly consult with area authorities. Sometimes, they even organize local focus groups when developing a new program. These actions are crucial to moderating the worst aspects of paternalism on the ground, but three elements counteract the broader efforts toward change.

The first element is that international peacebuilders face a dilemma. On the one hand, there are normative and practical reasons to encourage local participation and to avoid imposition. The idea of integrating host populations fits well with the liberal norms dominant on the international stage. The core idea of democracy (which the leading intervening organizations claim they want to spread) means participation of—or at the very least consent from—local stakeholders. The practical dimension is just as clear: most interveners know that local "participation leads to ownership [which in turn] leads to sustainability."55

On the other hand, integrating local stakeholders may worsen the situation. To begin with, participation can slow things to a standstill. The more numerous the parties to a negotiation, the more difficult it becomes to reach an agreement and the higher the likelihood that local spoilers will find an opportunity to hinder or even stall the peace process. Furthermore, local stakeholders regularly "game"

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53 See Chapter 9 in this volume, 291–314.


the international system, interacting with interveners strategically in order to extract as many resources from outsiders as possible and to maintain or increase their existing power. Thus, as explained earlier in this chapter, foreign interveners often worry that privileging local demands may lead to policy capture. In addition, governments and civil society groups do not necessarily try to promote the welfare of the population. As a result, partnering with national and local elites may actually reinforce existing problematic structures rather than promote peace. Finally, in a number of situations, interveners also face irreconcilable differences with the local or national elite, whose perspectives on contentious issues (like democracy and women's rights) may elicit demands that are unacceptable for many foreign and local peacebuilders.

Interviews with two donors, one based in South Sudan and the other in Congo, encapsulated the resulting dynamics. When we spoke, the first noted the problems inherent to imposing foreign ideas and mentioned that he and other interveners tried to involve their local counterparts in the design and implementation of international programs. He then explained why they regularly abandoned these efforts: Often expatriates get so frustrated at the behavior of their counterparts (like their abuse of power, resource embezzlement, and disregard for the plights of their fellow citizens) that they eventually stop trying to involve them or even get their consent. The second interviewee described the same dynamics in much harsher terms. In her words, the “contempt for local actors” that most of her expatriate colleagues expressed made it seem appropriate for interveners to “manipulate” local counterparts and try to impose programs and ideas on them. Whether framed in harsh or sympathetic language, the process is the same and so are the results: The dilemma international peacebuilders face reinforces their incentives to impose programs on host populations.

The second element that counteracts efforts toward change is that, for all interveners, accountability structures are oriented toward external entities, not toward beneficiaries. NGOs are accountable to their donors, which are UN agencies, other international organizations, European and North American states, or private funders from abroad. Likewise, government donors are accountable to their taxpayers and legislators. Peacekeeping missions report to the UN Security Council, UN agencies report to their headquarters in New York and Geneva, and these headquarters report to the UN member states. Even academic researchers prioritize publication of their findings in prestigious journals and presses, which are overwhelmingly located in Europe or North America, over dissemination to local populations in order to maintain their positions at universities.

Admittedly, numerous intervening organizations have signed on to international charters aimed at improving downward accountability such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership and the Accountability Charter for International NGOs. Some of these agencies have also developed mechanisms to gather feedback from stakeholders about their efforts, including participatory evaluations, complaints and response systems, perceptions studies, community scorecards, citizen report cards, and story-telling. However, these various initiatives are isolated, often incomplete, and they remain

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57 Barnett and Zürcher, “The Peacebuilder’s Contract.”
58 See ibid. for an explanation of how this may happen.
60 Alex Jacobs and Robyn Wilford, “Putting New Approaches to NGO Accountability into Action” (paper prepared for the Development’s Futures Conference, NUI, Galway, 2007) presents a very useful review of the scholarly literature on this problem. For analyses on peacebuilding, see Autesserre, Peaceland, ch. 6; and Chiyuki Aoi, Cedric De Coning, and Ramesh Chandra Thakur, Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), part V. On the perception of host populations: Anderson et al., Time to Listen, 91–3 and ch. 5.
62 Ibid., 2, 9–10, 14–19, and 22–3; and IRIN, “Are They Listening? Aid and Humanitarian Accountability” (Geneva: Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2012), 7–10. See also the material available on the website Listen First (http://listenfirst.mango.org.uk).
the exception rather than the rule. The resulting predominance of upward rather than downward accountability deprives intereners of incentives to obtain the consent of their intended beneficiaries, and it deprives these beneficiaries of the power to request an end to paternalistic practices.

The last obstacle to change arises from the detrimental byproducts of the politics of knowledge at work in the international peacebuilding field, which make it exceptionally difficult to move away from standard intervention routines. The experiences of the NGOs (such as International Alert and the International Rescue Committee) that have tried to promote local authorship and ownership by implementing community-driven reconstruction programs are telling. According to my interviews with the staff working on such initiatives, local communities are so used to seeing foreigners arrive with a bossy attitude and set ideas that it becomes challenging to implement the new approach. Instead of giving their opinions and requesting what they actually need, a number of grassroots communities construct their appeals to reflect what they think the expatriates want to hear, as a way of ensuring access to funding and help. In other words, despite considerable efforts, these interveners still often end up facing problems similar to those of their colleagues who use less progressive methodologies.

International paternalism thus persists virtually unhindered, a vicious cycle of imposition without consent and passive acceptance without appreciation. The actions of resistant local stakeholders and exceptional interveners may start to mitigate the worst consequences of paternalism on the ground, but they are unlikely to eliminate paternalism for good.

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63 Also Anderson et al., Time to Listen, i.
64 See Elisabeth King, “A Critical Review of Community-Driven Development Programmes in Conflict-Affected Contexts” (London: DFID and International Rescue Committee, 2013) for an analysis of these initiatives across various countries and organizations.

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Enabling or Disabling Paternalism:
(In)attention to Gender and Women’s Knowledge, Capacity, and Authority in Humanitarian Contexts

AISLING SWAINE

In 2006, working with an international aid agency in Darfur, Sudan, I was part of a large yet very constrained humanitarian response operation. Having worked in many prior operations globally, this was somewhat different. Humanitarian operations established in response to the Darfur crisis were severely and deliberately hampered by the Sudanese government. In an attempt to thwart international attention to a situation that was increasingly being noted for extensive human rights violations, international and national organizations were subject to a very effective intimidation campaign. It was so successful that international agencies performed operations as if walking on eggshells. There was a tacit consensus among agencies that the best-case scenario was to strive to maintain the provision of basic services, even where this meant working around, and saying little publicly about, the rights violations that were occurring within and outside the camps.

I was working on what might have been considered the most sensitive issue in that context at that time – the prolific use of sexualized violence, particularly rape, against women by parties to the conflict in Darfur. Sexualized violence in wartime is generally understood as a gendered violence, primarily impacting women and working off of gendered norms of power and inequalities between men and women. The prolific use of sexualized violence by armed actors became synonymous with the Darfur conflict in the global media in ways that had not been seen since the wars in the former Yugoslavia. The image of the raped female victim also became ubiquitous with Darfur and in many ways became a cornerstone of the multiple global advocacy movements that arose to decry what was happening there.

In this highly charged political situation, the act of rape and other kinds of sexualized violence took on hyper political significance. With the eyes of the International Criminal Court on the Darfur situation