Peaceland

Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention

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Cover image: An Indian UN peacekeeper stands guard as hundreds of displaced civilians seek shelter near the UN base in Kiwanja, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, January 21, 2006. Copyright © David Lewis / Reuters / Corbis.

Introduction

I made a number of faux pas during my first day as an international intervener in a conflict zone. In July 2000, I arrived in Kosovo for a six-month mission and was preparing to attend my first coordination meeting with representatives of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, donors, and military contingents of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. My colleagues had told me that these meetings always began with some significant delay, so I decided to postpone my departure and finish some office work in the meantime. When I finally got there, however, I discovered that this particular gathering was under the supervision of a few military actors who, as it turned out, were invariably punctual. To make matters worse, the room's creaking door and regrettable arrangement eliminated any chance for stragglers to enter discretely. Not that I would have been inconspicuous anyway: I was visibly out of place from the moment I stepped inside. In the hope of being easily recognizable to my new colleagues, I had proudly put on a vest emblazoned with my employer's logo, but, to my dismay, the peacekeeping soldiers were the only people displaying their organizational affiliation. Eyes turned from the speaker to me and, for a few interminable moments, I became the center of attention. Mortified, I scurried to the back of the room to find a seat (and hide).

As my first month progressed, I made fewer missteps. Still, I was puzzled. I had two graduate degrees in international affairs and a year of experience as an intern with various humanitarian and peacebuilding agencies in New York. I had even worked as a volunteer for grassroots organizations in India, Nicaragua, and South Africa. By industry standards, I was perfectly qualified for my entry-level role in Kosovo, yet I felt utterly lost.

I ultimately realized that all of this theoretical knowledge and technical experience was not enough to ensure my success. The community of international interveners that I had joined in Kosovo had a culture of their own. I had naively expected my colleagues' attitudes and behaviors to be as varied as the countries they came from and the organizations they represented. In fact they shared a common collection of practices, habits, and narratives that shaped their

every attitude and action. If I wanted to fit in, I had to learn the quotidian elements that veteran interveners saw as obvious, or even took for granted.

During my time in Kosovo, I did my best to assimilate into my new community and adapt to the international interveners' way of life. I followed my colleagues' standard practices, like attending coordination meetings, throwing going-away parties, and documenting every professional action in an endless stream of reports. I acquired their shared habits, such as following standard security procedures and socializing primarily with other expatriates. I became fluent in their language, with its technical vocabulary and alphabet soup of acronyms. I also learned their dominant narratives, notably those on our roles as foreign actors, our views of local counterparts, and our reasons for acting as we did. All in all, over the course of six months, I familiarized myself with the subtle hierarchy and the ritualized patterns of interaction that exist not only among interveners themselves but also between them and local populations. Plus, I figured out which meetings started on time and what I was supposed to wear to them.

These newly acquired competencies helped me successfully approach my later missions in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite the staggering differences between each of these countries – in terms of geographies, cultures, people, languages, dynamics of violence, and conflict histories – the interveners who worked in them shared the same daily modes of operation. After learning the ropes in Kosovo, I never again felt out of place when I arrived to work in a new conflict zone, because the characteristics of the international approach – the identities of the participants, the relationships among them and with local populations, and the other everyday elements – were all familiar to me. As I moved from one place to another and found the same kind of environments, the same types of actors, and sometimes even the same individuals, I started to feel part of a transnational community, a community of expatriates who devote their lives to working in conflict zones. I felt that I had become part of a new world: Peaceland.[1]

Peaceland and Its Puzzles

For close to fifteen years, I have been attached to this world. My husband and most of our friends inhabit Peaceland, and I return to it frequently. As I traveled from one conflict zone to another, I became increasingly obsessed with the issue of efficacy. When in the field, during formal meetings or around drinks in the evening, my fellow Peacelanders and I regularly deliberated the same questions: Why do peace interventions regularly fail to reach their full potential? What can account for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of international peacebuilding efforts? How can interveners be more successful when they are already effective and avoid failure otherwise? These subjects were and still are at the center of

[1] The neologism "Peaceland" is a paraphrase of the word "Aidland" coined in Apthorpe 2005.

policy and scholarly debates on intervention efforts. They are also the concerns that lie at the heart of this book.

For years, my friends and I returned to the same answers. To be more effective, we required more financial, logistical, and human resources. We also needed powerful states and organizations to stop ignoring or encouraging violence and, instead, start actively supporting peace. As I continued to live and work in intervention areas, I began to consider another explanation for ineffective peacebuilding: Many of the practices, habits, and narratives that shape international efforts on the ground – everyday elements that I had come to take for granted as an intervener – are, in fact, counterproductive.

This realization hit me ten years after my embarrassing first day in Kosovo, during one of my many sojourns in the Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforth, Congo), home to a conflict that ranks among the deadliest since World War II.[2] In an attempt to reconstruct state authority in the eastern part of the country, various international peacebuilding agencies had decided to assist the Congolese police in deploying officers to some of the most unstable areas. The implementation of the project began in May 2010, when the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) constructed police stations and helped transport Congolese police units to selected volatile villages. Upon completing this initiative, officials at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York claimed that they had successfully accomplished an essential step in their mandate to stabilize Congo. In theory, mobilizing a greater law enforcement presence in an unstable area would secure it, allowing for the deployment of other state representatives and eventually contributing to the reestablishment of state authority and the return to peace.

In reality, the program made a bad situation worse. The newly deployed police were untrained, and they had to compete for control of the area with both local militias and remnants of rebel groups. As a result, they could not make even a modest contribution to the reestablishment of law and order. Not only did they fail to improve the stability of the region, but they also became one more factor of insecurity. The new officers came from faraway provinces and had no ethnic or family links with surrounding groups. While this strategy was supposed to prevent corruption and collusion, it also produced a new force with no support among local populations, no deep-rooted personal stakes in bettering security in the area, and little knowledge of the specific local history and customs of the villagers. Even more problematic, the authorities in Kinshasa refused to support any units they considered "UNOPS police" and not state police, while the UN maintained that it was the Congolese government's responsibility to pay, feed, and house its own officers. Eventually, nobody took care of these

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[2] This book deliberately forgoes the use of the article "the" in front of Congo or Sudan, to avoid the colonialist overtones of this grammatical convention.

 On mortality in Congo, see the statistics in International Rescue Committee 2008 and the discussion of these figures in Goldstein 2011, pp. 260–264.

obligations. Lacking basic necessities, the police officers ended up preying on the very population they were tasked to protect. The Congolese authorities, the deployed police, and the affected communities all blamed the UN for the decline in the situation.

The initiative had followed a standard pattern for international interventions. Expatriate peacebuilders conceptualized the project with minimal local input. Then, they secured external resources to finance it. Finally, they tasked international agencies with implementing the project, and they involved local counterparts only in the final stages, as assistants, subcontractors, or mere recipients. Throughout this process, the foreign actors in charge relied on their own views of how best to rebuild a state, their own beliefs about what responsibilities a government should meet, and their own notions of what ordinary citizens would want. They worked hard, endured many deprivations, occasionally risked their lives, and became frustrated when – to their surprise – the situation worsened.

In fact, the UN actors could have easily predicted the police initiative's difficulties, as the program contained several elements that interveners commonly acknowledge to be problematic. It is conventional wisdom that local ownership is essential for successful peacebuilding, but local stakeholders rarely feel included in the design of international programs.[3] Practitioners and researchers have written countless books, articles, and reports to explain that approaches based on ready-to-use, universalized templates usually fail and context sensitivity is crucial, and yet interveners often use models that have worked in other conflict zones but are not appropriate for specific local conditions, just as the UN did in Congo.[4] Field-based international peacebuilders regularly emphasize the importance of good relationships between interveners and local actors; however, interactions between the two groups often remain

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[3] For a review of the main scholarly arguments emphasizing the importance of local ownership, see Sending 2009, p. 4. For the policy perspective, see Anderson and Olson 2003, pp. 32–33; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Paris Declaration* (2005) and *Accra Agenda for Action* (2008) (available at www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandac craagendaforaction.htm); and the *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship* (Stockholm, 2003), point 7 (available at www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org/Libraries/ Ireland_Doc_Manager/EN-23-Principles-and-Good-Practice-of-Humanitarian-Donorship.sflb. ashx). For analyses of the current implementation of the local ownership idea, see Campbell 2010 (notably pp. 9, 10, and 52–59); Donais 2009; Joseph 2007; Martin and Moser 2012; Richmond 2012; Sending 2010b; and Wilén 2009.

[4] Among many others: Andersen 2005; Anderson, Brown, et al. 2012, pp. 24–25 and chapter 5; Campbell 2012; Chandler 2005, p. 308; Chopra and Hohe 2004; Cousens, Kumar, et al. 2001, notably p. 15; Coyne and Pellillo 2012; Duffey 2000, notably p. 144; Ellis 2005; Escobar 1995; FEWER, International Alert, et al. 2004, chapter 3, module 1; Gilbert 2008, pp. 21–26; Hohe 2002; Lange 2004, notably pp. 12–13; Mac Ginty 2006 and 2008; Ottaway 2003; Paris 2004 and 2010; Peacekeeping Best Practices Section 2008, p. 39; Pouligny 2004, especially pp. 133–136 and 293; Salem 1997, chapter 2; Smith 2004, notably p. 10; Verma 2011, pp. 64–67; and Woodward 2007, pp. 160–161. For a discussion of this literature, see Moore 2013, pp. 29–30.

conflictual.[5] Evaluations of peacebuilding programs consistently underscore the need for interveners to speak at least one of the local languages of their area of deployment, but many interveners in the field lack such linguistic capabilities.[6] Local people and interveners themselves deplore the latter's tendency to live in a bubble, where they interact mostly with other expatriates and lack contact with host populations, and yet this phenomenon still occurs throughout zones of intervention.[7]

The persistence of these inefficient modes of operation is all the more perplexing because in many cases we cannot attribute it to callousness, stupidity, or lack of self-awareness on the part of the international peacebuilders. While not all interveners deployed in the field lie awake at night worrying about the effectiveness of their efforts, most of them genuinely try to end violence and work hard to improve local situations. Far from being callous, they are usually well-meaning individuals who have devoted their lives to combating injustice, violence, and poverty. Moreover, on average, they are intelligent, well-read, and well-educated people. Some of them even realize the consequences of their standard practices and feel very uncomfortable with the way international peacebuilding operates on the ground. Why, then, do certain ways of working persist although they are clearly ineffective? Moreover, why do interveners perpetuate even those modes of operation they know to be counterproductive?

Recent advances in the anthropology of aid provide a useful starting point for approaching these puzzles and the broader question of effectiveness. Raymond Apthorpe coined the term "Aidland" to describe how "aid workers inhabit a separate world with its own time, space, and economics."[8] Apthorpe's insight has inspired a new body of research on development and humanitarian aid, and I propose that it is fruitful to approach peacebuilding similarly.[9] International peacebuilders also inhabit a separate world with its own time, space, and economics – and, even more importantly, its own system of meaning.

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[5] Among others: Anderson 1999, pp. 62–63; Anderson and Olson 2003, chapters 4 and 5; Duffey 2000, p. 151; Heiberg and Holst 1986, pp. 410–411; Holohan 2005, pp. 74–85; Huang and Harris 2006, pp. 86 and 88–90; McWha 2011; and UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations – Department of Field Support 2012, p. 4.

[6] Public sources include CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2010b, pp. 3–4; Coles 2007, pp. 28–29; Last 2000, especially p. 87; Lehmann 1999, p. 74; Pouligny 1999 (pp. 416–417) and 2004 (p. 194); and Toshiya and Konishi 2012, pp. 56 and 70.

[7] Among many others: Eyben 2011; Harper 2011; Johnston 2005; McWha 2011, pp. 33–35; Mitchell 2011a, pp. 12–15; Mosse 2008, p. 122; Rajak and Stirrat 2011; and Verma 2011, pp. 67–74.

[8] Apthorpe 2005; and Fechter and Hindman 2011a, p. 13.

[9] For the research on development and humanitarian aid, see notably the various contributions to Fechter and Hindman 2011a and Mosse 2011. As will become clear throughout the book, earlier studies of development – notably Anderson 1999; Ferguson 1990; Mitchell 2002; and Scott 1998 – were also influential in shaping my research.

This metaphorical world, inhabited by the transnational community of inter-
veners for whom peace is either the primary objective (such as peacekeepers) or
part of a broader set of goals (such as certain diplomats and development
workers), I name Peaceland. In order to understand how and why this world
gets created and maintained, and how this process influences peacebuilding
effectiveness, I develop an ethnography of its inhabitants, meaning that I paint
a portrait of the interveners and their customs, rituals, cultures, structures,
beliefs, and behaviors.[10] My study focuses on the everyday elements that char-
acterize life and work in Peaceland: its standard practices (routine activities that
are socially meaningful and have an un-thought character[11]), shared habits
(automatic responses to the world[12]), and dominant narratives (stories that
people create to make sense of their lives and environments[13]). In documenting
the dynamics resulting from these elements, I provide a fresh answer to the
question of why strong boundaries exist between interveners and host popula-
tions. I also explain why dominant modes of operation (actions, behaviors, and
discourses based on prevailing practices, habits, and narratives) that most
interveners view as inefficient or even detrimental to their efforts nevertheless
persist. Finally, I offer a novel perspective from which to consider why interna-
tional interventions regularly fail to reach their full potential – and sometimes
fall flat altogether.

Although they are pervasive, there is nothing innate or unchangeable about
these everyday modes of operation. James Scambary, for instance, lived and
worked in Peaceland in a markedly different way than I and most of my other
contacts did.[14] James recalled that, during his deployment to Timor-Leste in the
early 2000s, he "did not have a car, so [he] could not go away to the countryside
to a nice guest house or to the beach for the day like all the others were doing"
during weekends. Instead of socializing with other foreign peacebuilders, he
"spent [his] time in [his] neighbors' backyards talking." Time passed, and
James became part of the local fabric. His Timorese friends spoke in his presence
in a way that they never did in front of other interveners. They mentioned hopes
and fears that they usually hid from expatriates, and they talked about incidents
that usually went unreported. The riots that erupted in 2006 in Timor-Leste,
which almost collapsed the peace process, took virtually all interveners by
surprise, but James Scambary was one of the few foreigners who had predicted
a deterioration of the situation and had tried to convince his colleagues to help

[10] This sentence builds on the definition of "ethnography" in Harris and Johnson 2000, p. 4.
[11] Swidler 2001, pp. 74–75; Pouliot 2008 and 2010; and Pouliot and Adler 2011b. See Chapter 1 in
this book for a more thorough definition and a discussion of this concept.
[12] Swidler 2001, p. 75; and Hopf 2010. See Chapter 1 for more details.
[13] Abbott 2008; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008; and Patterson and Monroe 1998. See also
Chapter 1 in this book.
[14] The rest of this paragraph is based on the author's on-record interview with James Scambary,
independent researcher, Australian National University, Dili, Timor-Leste, February 2012.

prevent the looming crisis.[15] Again, this was not necessarily because Scambary was smarter or better trained than other interveners. He had, however, a comparative advantage: in-depth personal relationships with his neighbors. The backyard discussions had provided him with a different, and much more accurate, perception of the challenges to the ongoing peace process.

This book is not just about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the interveners' dominant modes of operation. It is also about the individuals and organizations who, like James, evade, ignore, or even actively challenge the international peacebuilders' dominant practices and suggest alternative modes of operation. It is by looking at these exceptional cases that we can begin to understand how to reform the way peacebuilding works on the ground, so that interveners stop perpetuating ineffective modes of action and instead help construct a better system.

Everyday Dimensions of Peacebuilding Effectiveness

International peace interventions have multiplied since the end of the Cold War, with UN operations, non-governmental agencies, donors, diplomatic missions, and regional organizations becoming increasingly numerous and influential.[16] Identifying the factors that influence the effectiveness of these initiatives is of critical importance to scholars, practitioners, and people living in post-war states.

Admittedly, peacebuilding efficacy relies primarily on the actions, interests, and strategies of national and local actors and of potential outside spoilers.[17] Wars can end only when hostile parties at the local, national, and international levels agree to stop using violence to resolve their differences, and when their fellow citizens concurrently strive to establish and maintain lasting solutions to the conflict. Foreign interveners can, at best, support peace initiatives and undermine efforts to resume violence.

That being said, external contributions, however limited, can mean the difference between war and peace. Regardless of local conditions, foreign peace interventions increase the chances of establishing a durable peace.[18] Recent quantitative analyses show that international interventions have significantly

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[15] Several other interviewees confirmed the fact that Scambary had been one of the very few foreigners to predict the 2006 riots.

[16] On UN and non-UN peace operations: Daniel and Taft 2008, p. 11; and Duffey 2000, p. 142. On non-governmental organizations: Barnett 2011, pp. 3–5; and Werker and Ahmed 2008, p. 75. On donors: Barnett 2011, p. 4. On international actors in general: Anderson and Olson 2003, p. 8; Barnett 2006, pp. 87–88; Cousens, Kumar, et al. 2001, p. 1; and Garb and Allen Nan 2009, p. xiv.

[17] Sending 2010b and 2011.

[18] Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2004 and 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; Goldstein 2011; Hampson 1996; Howard 2008; and Walter 2002 demonstrate this point based on macro-level data (statistics for national and international conflicts), and Barron and Burke 2008 on micro-level analyses. For a similar claim by local people in countries of intervention, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2011b, p. 1.

improved security conditions in many places where they have been deployed, even if other measures of peacebuilding success are less optimistic.[19] The international efforts in Congo, which most scholars and policy analysts view as failing, also aptly illustrate the value of peacebuilders. Despite their poor overall performance, interveners achieved a number of positive results. Reestablishing even a precarious peace over most of the Congolese territory would not have been possible without the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission and the work of African and Western diplomats. Likewise, it is mostly thanks to these international actors that Congo managed to organize its first democratic elections in 2006. At the time of this writing in 2013, the UN mission remains the only military force capable of protecting the population from abuses by the Congolese army and various other armed groups, even if they do so imperfectly. Foreign humanitarian agencies are similarly the only ones able to respond to epidemics and, in the eastern provinces, to provide access to clean drinking water and basic health care. In sum, improving the effectiveness of external efforts can significantly increase the prospects for peace.

This book uses a situation-specific definition of effectiveness, as it is the most appropriate for studying intervention efforts on the ground (see Chapter 1). A peacebuilding project, program, or intervention is effective when a large majority of the people involved in it – including both implementers (international interveners and local peacebuilders) and intended beneficiaries (including local elite and ordinary citizens) – view it as having promoted peace in the area of intervention.

Ascertaining the reasons for international intervention efficacy and inefficacy, and explaining why international peace efforts regularly fail to reach their full potential, requires a variety of approaches and analyses. The prevailing scholarship on this topic focuses on the impact of vested interests, material constraints, and the imposition of liberal values. These analyses tell us a great deal about how policies, institutions, ideologies, and discourses affect interventions.[20] However, while there are some exceptions, the vast majority of scholars and practitioners consider the everyday dimensions of peacebuilding efforts on the ground unimportant. As a result, we do not know much about the "nuts and bolts" of peacebuilding: the banal, everyday activities that actually make up the bulk of the work.

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[19] The quantitative studies include: Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; and Goldstein 2011. For less optimistic evaluations, see Heathershaw 2008; Licklider 1993; Lund 2003; Mac Ginty 2006; Neumann 2011; and Stedman 1991. Paris 2011, pp. 351–353 develops a nuanced discussion of the record of peace interventions. See also Chapter 1 in this book, section "Peacebuilding Effectiveness: Definitions and Contestation," for a more thorough presentation of the debate on the rate of success and failure in international peacebuilding.

[20] The rest of this paragraph builds on the insights presented in Fechter and Hindman 2011a, introduction; and Verma 2011, notably pp. 62–63; as well as on personal communications with Dr. Audra Mitchell (lecturer in international relations, University of York, August and September 2011). See also Sending 2010b, p. 1 for a similar claim.

Scholars such as Oliver Richmond and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh have already called for a renewed attention to "the everyday" in the study of international interventions, but the everyday experience in question is usually that of local actors.[21] While we have extensive ethnographic data on host populations and many insightful analyses of how their cultures and practices can promote or impair effective conflict resolution, the ethnographic gaze has rarely focused on those performing the intervention.[22] Several social scientists have recently produced fascinating studies that begin to fill this gap, but these authors focus on the impact of the everyday on development, humanitarian aid, or democratization.[23] Only a few anthropologists (Paul Higate, Marsha Henry, and Robert Rubinstein) and political scientists (Audra Mitchell, Béatrice Pouligny, and Ole-Jacob Sending) have researched the influence of the everyday on peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.[24] Building off this diverse array of insights, this book examines the everyday implementation of international initiatives on the ground to develop a complementary explanation for peacebuilding effectiveness, and thus paint a more complete picture of how interventions operate.

My central argument is as follows. I demonstrate that mundane elements – such as the expatriates' social habits, standard security procedures, and habitual approaches to collecting information on violence – strongly impact the effectiveness of intervention efforts. I also emphasize the influence of the informal and the personal on formal professional initiatives. Everyday practices shape overall interventions from the bottom up. They enable, constitute, and help reproduce the strategies, policies, institutions, and discourses that political scientists usually study. They also explain the existence and continued use of ways of working that interveners view as inefficient, ineffective, or even counterproductive.

I am not suggesting that daily habits and practices explain everything about the effectiveness of international peace interventions. I simply argue that an investigation of such everyday elements sheds light on several unexplored facets of this topic. It enables us to grasp why certain modes of action may persist even when interveners know that they are detrimental to their efforts. It also elucidates how the constraints, interests, and liberal values that other scholars study are created, sustained, and reinforced – or challenged – on the ground. As a whole, this book demonstrates that the process of international efforts (the "how") is just as important to examine as their substance (the "what"). The way in which interveners interact with local stakeholders or construct

[21] Richmond 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2011; and Tadjbakhsh 2011. For a related approach, see Mac Ginty 2008 and 2011. For an analysis, see Higate and Henry 2009, pp. 1–2 and 16; and Mitchell 2011b.

[22] On the cultures of host populations and peacebuilding, see, among many others studies: Avruch 1998; Duffey 2000; Mac Ginty 2008; Richmond 2009; Schirch 2005; and Shaw, Waldorf, et al. 2010.

[23] On development: Fechter and Hindman 2011a; and Mosse 2011. On humanitarian aid: Duffield 2010; and Smirl 2008. On democratization: Coles 2007; and Holohan 2005.

[24] Higate and Henry 2009; Mitchell 2011b; Rubinstein 2008; Pouligny 2004; and Sending 2010b.

knowledge of their areas of deployment deserves the same critical attention as the actual objectives that peacebuilders pursue, such as reintegrating militias or promoting geostrategic interests. For this reason, analyses of international interventions which fail to consider everyday elements – for instance, studies based exclusively on instrumental or normative rationality – are necessarily incomplete.[25] In other words, my approach and existing explanations are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary.

I develop this argument based on a year of ethnographic study in Congo, enriched with material from brief research trips in Burundi, Cyprus, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, South Sudan, and Timor-Leste (see the map of fieldwork sites in Figure 1). The material collected specifically for this project includes 15 months of field observations, 295 in-depth interviews, 124 discrete participant observation events lasting more than 330 hours in total, and hundreds of key documents (see the Appendix for more details). In addition to analyzing this new data, I draw extensively on both the material I collected for a previous project on Congo, which includes more than 330 interviews and another 1.5 years of field observations, and my 2 years of work experience as an intervener in Afghanistan, Congo, Kosovo, Nicaragua, and in the New York headquarters of various organizations. Altogether, I rely on several years of ethnographic inquiry in conflict zones around the world. I spent these years embedded in the communities I was studying, observing them sometimes from the inside, as a fellow intervener, and other times from the outside, as a researcher.

My interpretation of the concept of intervention overlaps with its standard definition in international relations scholarship, which focuses on the use of military force by states.[26] But like most researchers who focus specifically on peacebuilding, I define interveners to include not only states but also inter-governmental and nonstate actors, and their actions to encompass not only use of military force but also a range of other military and civilian undertakings aimed at ending existing violence and preventing its recurrence.[27]

I examine all of the foreign entities – people, countries, and organizations – whose official goal is to help build peace in their countries of deployment, regardless of whether or not they have other objectives alongside that goal. These international peacebuilders may be diplomats, other government officials (such as defense officers), personnel of non-governmental agencies, academic experts serving as advisors or consultants, employees of private subcontractors or for-profit development firms, and staff of international organizations – both military and civilian. The interveners I study are thus a diverse group. They

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[25] Based on Hopf 2010, p. 540. See also Chapter 1 in this book.

[26] For instance, Chesterman 2001; Walzer 1977; and Wheeler 2000. For a compelling critique of these standard definitions, see Mitchell 2014, pp. 3–9.

[27] Authors using a similar definition include, among many others: Brown 2006; Chopra and Hohe 2004; Coles 2007; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Mitchell 2014; Rubinstein 2008; and Sørbø 2010.

Kosovo

Cyprus

Israel and
the Palestinian
Territories

Nicaragua

Democratic
Republic
of Congo

Afghanistan

South Sudan

Burundi

Timor-Leste

Site used for theory building (and where I previously
worked as an intervener)

Other countries where I conducted research specifically
for this project

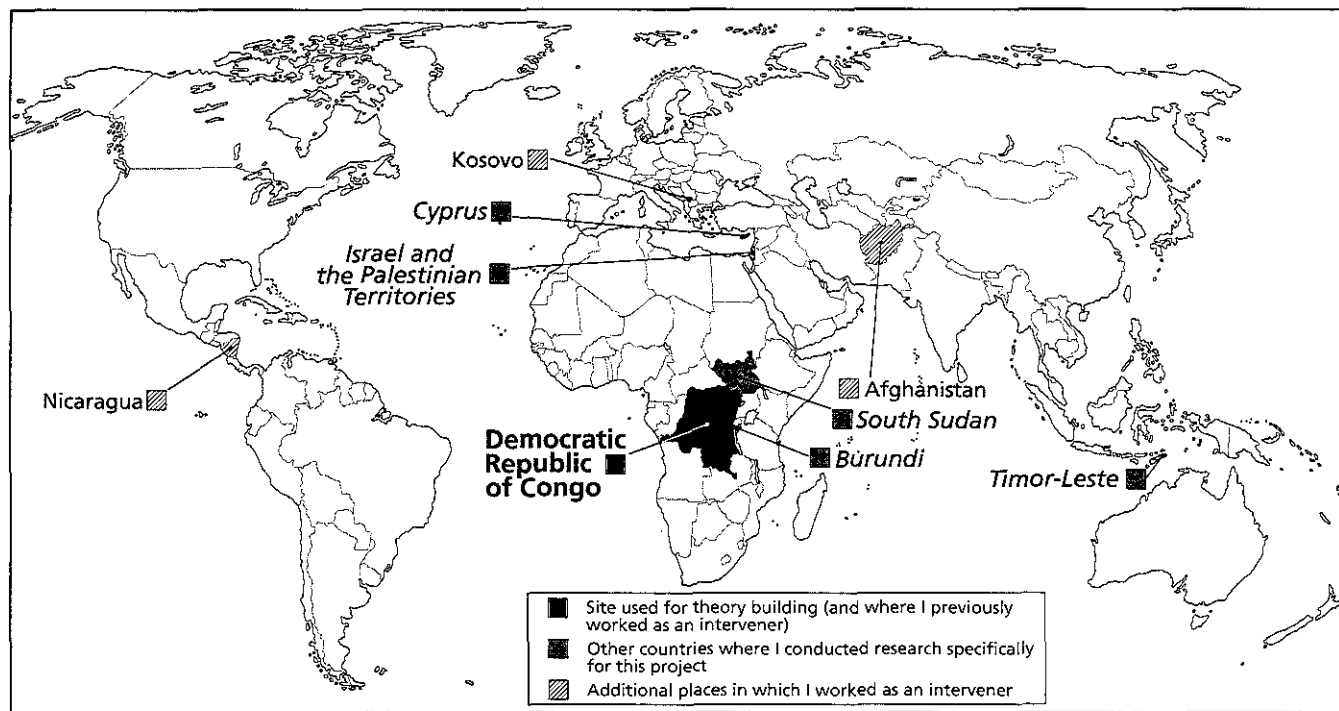Additional places in which I worked as an intervener

FIGURE 1 Map of Fieldwork Sites

include the staff of peacekeeping missions (notably UN operations) and of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in conflict resolution, such as Search for Common Ground and Life and Peace Institute. They also encompass members of other international, non-governmental, donor, or governmental agencies who had "peacebuilding," "peacekeeping," "conflict resolution" (or an equivalent word) in their job titles or descriptions, or who worked on projects with an explicit conflict-resolution goal, even if their organizations' main mandate was not explicitly related to peace. In addition, I analyze humanitarian, human rights, and development actors when doing so can help me better understand peacebuilding dynamics. In the book, I focus on the interveners deployed on the ground: the people who actually carry out the interventions on an everyday basis. (That said, I did interview their colleagues based in headquarters, to compare the perspectives of each group on relevant field dynamics.) As Chapter 5 and the introduction to Part I further detail, the individuals at the center of my analysis come from a wide range of geographic, organizational, professional, religious, and personal backgrounds.

This book demonstrates that the interveners' everyday practices and habits influence the effectiveness of international peace efforts in many different ways. To begin with, the manner in which foreign peacebuilders construct knowledge of the countries in which they work often prompts them to rely on narratives that are misleading or incomplete. Since interveners usually value technical proficiency over country-specific expertise, the vast majority arrive with little to no understanding of their locale of deployment. In the field, they regularly use inefficient data collection techniques and rely on biased samples of informants. These standard modes of action limit the extent to which international peacebuilders comprehend the contexts in which they work. Therefore, to make sense of their environments, they tend to use prevailing but overly simplified narratives as substitutes for more nuanced explanations of dynamics on the ground. In the case of Congo, for instance, narratives portraying illegal natural resource exploitation as the main cause of violence, sexual violence as the worst consequence, and statebuilding as the primary solution directly shaped international response to the conflict. The African-versus-Arab narrative carried similar weight in Darfur, as did the emphasis on the East-West divide in Timor-Leste. Because interveners depend on these dominant narratives instead of on in-depth analyses of the local contexts, they regularly misunderstand the phenomena they are trying to address, such as the causes of and potential solutions to violence. As a result, although some projects eventually better the lives of local people, others fail to bring about significant improvements, and some even compound the problems that the interveners originally sought to address.

The interveners' everyday modes of operation also create and maintain firm boundaries between them and their local counterparts. The shared experience of foreign peacebuilders as outsiders living in a conflict zone, in addition to their perception of themselves as markedly different from host populations, creates a distance between the two groups. The international peacebuilders'

daily routines, including their security procedures and their insistence on advertising their actions as well as the way that they value external expertise over local knowledge, further widen the split between them and local people. These practices also reinforce a pervasive power disparity between the interveners and their intended beneficiaries. The ostensible goal of the expatriates – to help the host country and its citizens – already enables them to claim the moral high ground. Foreign peacebuilders deployed in conflict zones also enjoy enormous material, symbolic, social, and cultural resources. The expatriates' daily routines publicize, perpetuate, and reinforce awareness of these advantages and construct an image of foreign peacebuilders as superior to local people. The divide between interveners and host populations, and the constant emphasis on the eminence of the former, regularly sour the indispensable relationships between interveners and their local counterparts. These tensions habitually prevent local ownership and authorship, and they marginalize and antagonize host populations. As a result, local people frequently evade, contest, resist, or reject the international initiatives designed to help them.

Ultimately, these everyday elements can perpetuate even the standard modes of operation that interveners acknowledge to be counterproductive. The expatriates' deficient understanding of local contexts prompts them to employ ready-to-use templates of conflict resolution, even when these universal models are ill-suited to local conditions. The routine absence of close relationships between interveners and their local counterparts reinforces the foreigners' tendency to create parallel systems of governance. Their frequent disregard of local knowledge legitimizes their rapid turnover from country to country, as acquiring thematic experience in a variety of conflict settings takes precedence over developing an in-depth understanding of a specific situation. Moreover, their lack of local knowledge enables many of the peacebuilders to view as acceptable short-term and top-down approaches to complex political, economic, and social problems. Their search for neutrality and their obsession with quantifiable outcomes also orient their efforts toward certain strategies and away from others that are just as necessary.

These various dynamics have four distinct, cumulative impacts on peace and conflict. The first set of effects is positive. The dominant modes of operation enable interveners to function in the difficult environments of conflict zones, from getting a handle on complex situations to raising resources and remaining safe and sane. The prevailing practices, habits, and narratives therefore facilitate an international involvement that can, and sometimes does, help build a sustainable peace. At the same time, though, the prevailing modes of operation have unintended consequences that produce three kinds of negative outcomes in peacebuilding efforts: the counterproductive, the ineffective, and the inefficient. The biased information and analysis, frequent misunderstandings, and the focus on top-down causes and solutions (and on other dominant narratives) regularly prevent interveners from recognizing existing signs of violence or indications that conflict might escalate. In the worst-case scenarios, international

peacebuilders end up fueling violence, as they did in Congo when their focus on sexual abuse and statebuilding led to more human rights atrocities (see Chapter 4). In most cases, however, the consequences of the dominant practices, habits, and narratives are less severe, though still undesirable. Interveners adopt strategies and policies that are ineffective or inefficient, thus missing opportunities to alleviate conflict.[28]

The existence of these general trends does not mean that all interveners are identical. There are variations in their modes of operation and the extent to which those modes display the precise array of characteristics I detail in this book. Furthermore, many individuals – notably newcomers to Peaceland, interveners from neighboring countries, and people with especially strong personal ties to their areas of deployment – actively contest the dominant practices, habits, and narratives and try to bring to light their detrimental effects. A number of individuals and organizations even constitute exceptions to the dominant modes of acting and thinking, as they embody entirely different approaches. I pay particular attention to these contestations and exceptions throughout the book, as they allow me to specify the conditions under which peace interventions can be more successful. Peacebuilding initiatives are much more effective, for instance, when interveners value local expertise on par with thematic knowledge (Part I), develop personal and social relationships with their local counterparts (Chapter 5), and forgo standard security routines and the requirement to advertise their actions (Chapter 7).

This research objective faces one inherent dilemma, which Peter Uvin perfectly expressed in the introduction to his well-known study of development aid in Rwanda before the 1994 genocide.[29] My analysis focuses on the peacebuilding world at large and is therefore bound to generalize and simplify. No matter how much I tried to delve into the variations that exist within each group and identify exceptions to each trend, it is likely that, for any statement I make, there have been individuals who acted or thought differently. My goal is not to provide a comprehensive list of every variation and exception, but instead to focus on those that offer enhanced theoretical and policy insights.

The culture of secrecy of the organizations I study, together with the sensitivity of the data I collected, raises an additional challenge. Virtually all of my interviewees and contacts asked to remain anonymous due to the personal and professional risks involved in providing information for this book. 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 the data 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

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[28] Table 2 in Chapter 1 clarifies which of the dominant practices, habits, and narratives on which this book focuses are particularly inefficient, ineffective, or counterproductive.

[29] The next two sentences paraphrase Uvin 1998, p. 9.

field observations. To ensure their reliability, I have triangulated all the statements that I make in this book, including those that I could not fully reference: For each, I build on at least three different sources, and usually many more.

In choosing evidence from my many discussions to illustrate my argument, I have selected quotations that express opinions or examples illustrating experiences shared with me by a large number of people (except of course when I analyze exceptions).[30] In some cases, I quote individuals who stated a widely held viewpoint with particular clarity; when relevant, I provide information about this individual to help the reader better contextualize the quote. In other cases, I heard a comment so frequently that I use language such as "according to many interviewees" or "a number of people mentioned." In these situations where many contacts used the same or similar language, I do not try to identify the characteristics of all the people who made the point. Instead, I mention the shared characteristics of the speakers in order to help the reader contextualize my claims.

Why Read This Book?

There are a number of ways to read this book. For the scholar of war and peace, this book suggests a new explanation for the varying effectiveness of international efforts. It also elucidates why certain modes of action may persist even when people are aware that they are ineffective. For other political scientists, I show the influence of the everyday elements of international action that our discipline usually regards as unimportant or irrelevant to understanding macro-level issues. For the student of international organizations and global governance, I demonstrate that peacebuilding actors of all kinds occupy a collective normative and sociological space and that it is fruitful to treat these actors, in aggregate, as a unit of analysis. For the reader interested in social science theories, I contribute to three related topics at the cutting edge of research: the increased attention to practice and ethnography in political science, the focus on micro-level dynamics in peace and conflict research, and the attention to the everyday in the anthropology of aid. For the researcher looking for historical or anthropological data, I present a wealth of unique ethnographic material on how international peace interventions operate in the field, especially in Congo.

Lastly, for policy-makers and practitioners, this book suggests tools and ideas with which to improve their peacebuilding efforts. Would-be interveners can also read this work as part of their predeparture preparations so that they know what to expect when they arrive in the field and how to avoid the pitfalls inherent to their colleagues' everyday practices, habits, and narratives. Additionally, this book may help local peacebuilders to better understand their international

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[30] This writing approach was inspired by – and the entire paragraph paraphrases – Anderson, Brown, et al. 2012, p. 4.

partners and to find ways to develop more productive relationships between the two groups.

It is also important to keep in mind that the peace interveners I study are an example of a much broader group. As will become clear in the course of the book, and as I further elucidate in the Conclusion, the theoretical and empirical insights that I offer can help scholars and policy-makers better understand other domains of international relations from a range of historical contexts – including development and humanitarian aid, diplomatic engagement, business, counter-insurgency, and colonialism. My approach and findings offer a way to illuminate the everyday habits, practices, and narratives that influence the effectiveness of these various kinds of international efforts and yet remain insufficiently studied.

There is one way not to read this book, however. My argument is not that support for international peacebuilders should be eliminated altogether, letting people who live in conflict zones resolve problems on their own. Relying exclusively on local actors and local expertise is not the answer. Such a tactic would create a number of problems, which other scholars have extensively studied, and which I note throughout the book.[31] Foreign interveners can make a number of distinct contributions, as I discuss in the introduction to Part I. There is therefore a wide consensus among scholars and host populations that outside expertise and outside actors are often indispensible for effective peacebuilding.[32]

As the book details, however, international peacebuilding never reaches its full potential, and it regularly has negative, unintended consequences. It is imperative that we end the dirtiest and nastiest aspects of interventions, such as the human trafficking and the abuses of beneficiaries that other scholars have documented – and that, thankfully, remain the exception rather than the norm.[33] But it is also vital that we take steps to mitigate the unintentional harm that interveners regularly do. We need not stop international peacebuilding activities altogether, but rather end (or at least compensate for) their negative impacts while preserving their positive outcomes.

This book aims to assist this reform process by developing a nuanced and constructive analysis that will enable practitioners and policy-makers to identify the areas most in need of change. Policy-makers and practitioners often blame problems with interventions on the way policies are formulated, the resulting constraints on the international peacebuilders' work, and the populations' high expectations and lack of understanding of the interveners' roles. There is thus far too little acknowledgement that practitioners should also revise their everyday practices and habits, and even less reflection on how to do so. Given all the

[31] For references to other studies that develop this point, see the introduction to Part I in this book, section "Outsiders' and Insiders' Roles in Peacebuilding."

[32] Anderson, Brown, et al. 2012, notably chapter 1, and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2008a provide a good overview of local perspectives on this question.

[33] Simm 2013 develops a fascinating analysis of these problems and their potential solutions. Earlier useful studies focusing on peacekeeping missions include Higate and Henry 2009, pp. 145–150; Martin 2005; Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf 2002, chapter 5; and UN General Assembly 2005.

constraints and challenges on-the-ground peacebuilders face in their daily work, those who do realize how much damage their routine modes of action can cause often lack ideas on how to change their practices for the better. It is my hope that this book will help bring to light both these flaws and the existing attempts to overcome these shortcomings. The Conclusion also offers ideas about the types of reforms necessary and potential ways to execute them.

Overview

I develop my argument through seven further chapters. Chapter 1 illuminates the theoretical stakes of my analysis and presents my conceptual tools and research approach in more detail. I first discuss the difficulties in defining intervention "successes" and "failures" and emphasize that the attempts to delineate these concepts are part of the very power struggles studied in this book. I then demonstrate that field-based interveners enjoy substantial leeway in implementing instructions from headquarters and national capitals, and thus that consideration of the specific dynamics of on-the-ground peacebuilding is indispensable. The next section develops the main concepts that I use, including practices, habits, and narratives, and clarifies how these concepts help explain the constitution, change, and perpetuation of the status quo. I also elucidate how my analysis complements existing explanations of peacebuilding effectiveness – notably those based on constraints, vested interests, liberal values, and cultural differences among interveners. The last section of this chapter clarifies the scope of my argument. Readers who wish to know more about the methodological aspects of my research can find additional details in the Appendix.

The rest of the book is divided into two parts. Part I (Chapters 2, 3, and 4) examines the process through which interveners construct knowledge on their countries of deployment and the impact of this process on intervention effectiveness. As a prelude to this analysis, I briefly present the international interveners on whom this book focuses and clarify insiders' and outsiders' respective roles in peacebuilding.

Chapter 2 documents the struggle among the inhabitants of Peaceland to determine what constitutes relevant expertise in the field of peacebuilding. I demonstrate that intervening agencies value thematic expertise over local knowledge, and I trace the sources of this preference. I then show how this bias underlies many problems that commonly mar peace interventions on the ground: the excessive reliance on external knowledge and actors, the devaluation of local populations' and local staff's expertise, the deployment of interveners who do not speak any of the local languages, the high turnover rate of expatriate peacebuilders, the use of models and templates unsuited to local conditions, and the compartmentalization of intertwined aspects of the intervention.

Chapter 3 focuses on the reactions of host populations to the patterns documented in Chapter 2. I show that valuing external expertise over local

knowledge antagonizes local stakeholders and impedes both their ownership and authorship. These dynamics create a widespread perception that interveners impose their ideas and programs on host populations. The ensuing resentment ultimately encourages local stakeholders to contest, adapt, or resist international efforts. These responses may, at times, improve living conditions for the intended beneficiaries, but their overall impact on the international programs is clear: They generate multiple obstacles to the international efforts, thus decreasing their eventual efficiency and effectiveness.

Chapter 4 examines the manner in which on-the-ground peacebuilders make sense of their environments in the face of these circumstances. I identify the various obstacles that they face when collecting and analyzing data on their locale of deployment, including their tendency to rely on a biased sample of sources. The rest of the chapter emphasizes the harmful consequences of these information-gathering and analytical shortcomings. Lack of in-depth local knowledge regularly entices international peacebuilders to rely on simple (and often overly simplistic) narratives to design their intervention strategies. I develop an in-depth case study of the impact of dominant narratives on the conflict in Congo to illuminate the unintended consequences of this practice. I then flag other detrimental misunderstandings that recur throughout conflict zones, such as the interveners' regular misinterpretations of key dynamics of war and peace, and their recurring failure to appreciate the difference between their conceptions and the local views of peace and peacebuilding. Finally, I explain that the shortage of accurate information reinforces the interveners' tendency to adopt a top-down approach to peacebuilding, thus overlooking critical bottom-up dynamics.

Part II (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) documents the everyday practices and habits – both social and professional – that make the dynamics I study in Part I possible. These dominant modes of operation have a number of positive, intended effects: They enable interveners and their organizations to function in conflict zones and to help the host country build peace. However, they also have a number of negative, unintended consequences.

Chapter 5 studies the bottom-up, everyday personal, social, and professional processes that create boundaries between interveners and local people. Expatriate peacebuilders have a common official goal and dense professional and social interactions. Even more importantly, they share a common experience of life in conflict zones. Although there are many tensions and rivalries between the different types of interveners, a key element preserves the cohesion of the group despite its internal rifts: the presence of "others" (local populations), against whom interveners construct their group identity. I trace the source of the separation between the two groups and identify the factors that lead to variations in these patterned relationships. I then explore the role, presence, and development of exceptions to these dominant trends. The final section highlights the main inadvertent effects of these boundaries.

The next two chapters identify the top-down and bottom-up elements that perpetuate the boundaries and enable them to persist despite the fact that

numerous interveners recognize their counterproductive nature and, in some cases, actively challenge them. Chapter 6 focuses on the structure of inequality that permeates relationships between international peacebuilders and local stakeholders. The mission that interveners share – to help the country of intervention and its people – enables them to claim a moral high ground, a process that often antagonizes local people. The enormous material, social, and symbolic resources that foreign peacebuilders enjoy and the fact that interveners are usually accountable to their donors and headquarters, not their intended beneficiaries, further reinforce the boundaries. They also decrease the incentives for expatriates to challenge the structure of inequality and promote change on the ground.

Chapter 7 examines the daily work routines that international peacebuilders follow across areas of deployment and that they usually view as commonsensical. The first section focuses on standard security procedures. I demonstrate that field-based interveners share a culture of insecurity, and I trace the consequences of the common security practices. The second section examines three widespread intervention rituals – the interveners' need to advertise their actions, their obligation to report those activities regularly, and their emphasis on maintaining impartiality. The last section examines the quantifiable and short-term nature of the results that interveners strive to attain. In each of the three sections, I trace the source of these practices, and I illuminate how these habitual ways of working further separate local populations and international peacebuilders into two distinct and unequal groups. I also show how these practices and habits together compound many of the problems analyzed throughout the book, notably the lack of understanding of local contexts and the interveners' beliefs that their narratives are apt and their social and professional routines appropriate.

The Conclusion elucidates the implications of my analysis for researchers and policy-makers. I first summarize the argument of the book and note the topics in need of further research. I end by offering suggestions to improve the effectiveness of international peace efforts. I advise on how to initiate the battle over ideas, and I develop a series of concrete recommendations to rebalance the value of local and thematic knowledge and to break the boundaries between interveners and local people.