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The Emotional is Political: Analyzing Listening Practices of 'Internationals' in Peacebuilding Partnerships

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The Emotional is Political:  
Analyzing Listening Practices of ‘Internationals’ in Peacebuilding Partnerships

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Political Science

by

Pernilla Johansson

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Cecelia Lynch, Chair  
Associate Professor Bronwyn Leebaw  
Associate Professor Keith Topper  
Professor Francesca Polletta

2018



## DEDICATION

To

Kevin, Jonathan, and Vanja  
Who lived as if it matters

“And somewhere between the time you arrive and the time you go  
May lie a reason you were alive but you’ll never know”

Jackson Browne, For a Dancer

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Other faculty and staff at UCI provided much-needed encouragement over the years. Thanks to Scott Bollens (vulnerability!), Maria Bermudez (fearless flair!) Graeme Boushey (Swedish indie!), Shani Brasier (all that food!), Tomas Figueroa (NSF calculations!), Paula Garb (practice matters!), Jeff Kopstein (positivist questioning!), Kristen Monroe (ethics lunch!), John Sommerhauser (all those friendly e-mails!), and of course Claudia Cheffs, Andrew Hallak, and Liz Nguyen who now run the department in the most upbeat and helpful manner. Thanks also to the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding, the Center on Global Peace and Conflict, and the Newkirk Center for Science and Society who funded my research travels.

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Friends outside of school – I missed you! Some were particularly involved in the dissertation by providing input or housing, drinks or distraction. This is such a puny recognition, but thanks to Brandon and Camille Bien for all the excursions we did and wanted to do; Sara Lhådö and Christina Wassholm for all those cigarettes; Åse Richard for all the talks; Åsa Forsman, Yllka Soba, and Maja Stajčić for homes away from home; Monica Nordenwald for long and Jöran Ramhällén for short neurotic fika:s; Maya Forstater for drinks with a view(!); Göran Hemberg for going to Nixon’s house with me; Ida Udović for the practice interview; Patrik Edstedt and Helena Kaarle for our Christmas travels and Hornstull hangouts, and Jan Barrish, Tara Motevalli, and Lena Levin for – well, let’s pick that poetry night; Markus Larsson and Ulrik Janusson for our book club which made me read *something* else; and to Hanna Fägerlind, Susanne Gräslund, Lena (again), Malin Strid, and Maja Åberg, for 18 years of feminist dinners which kept me inspired. Finally, thanks to zn and scream for still dragging me to bars and music festivals.

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Speaking of awkward, none of this would have happened if it hadn't been Martin's turn to pick a place (I picked Kosovo). And Martin, it's basically your own fault – if you'd only let me become an OC housewife (I had pink sandals and everything) none of your lonely so-called holidays ('I can't, I'm reading!'), cozy Friday nights ('I can't, I'm writing!'), or puppy-raising ('I can't, I'm off to Nairobi again!') would have had to happen. For all of it, thanks. I can't believe my luck.



# CURRICULUM VITAE

**Pernilla Johansson**

## **Education**

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**University of California, Irvine**, Irvine, CA

*Ph.D., Political Science*, June 2018

Concentrations: International Relations, Political Theory

**University of California, Irvine**, Irvine, CA

*M.A., Political Science*, June 2016

**University of Uppsala**, Uppsala, Sweden

*B.A., Peace and Conflict Studies*, January 2013

**University of Uppsala**, Uppsala, Sweden.

*M.Sc., International Economics and Business Administration*, May 1997

## **Research Publications**

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**“Feeling for the Game: How Emotions Shape Listening in Peacebuilding Partnerships.”** *E-International Relations*, May 17, 2017. Available at: <http://www.e-ir.info>.

**“Public Spheres on the Move: The Embodied Deliberation of Cycling in Los Angeles.”** *Space and Polity* 21 (1): 59-74. 2017. Co-author: S. Liou. (Also forthcoming in hardback.)

## **Research Affiliations, Awards, Grants, and Fellowships**

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**Associate Dean’s Fellowship**, Replacing Teaching Assistantship with Writing Fellowship. UCI Winter Quarter, January - March 2018

**Associate Researcher**, *Global Politics and Security*, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, September 2016 – December 2017

**Visiting Graduate Student**, *Critical Global Politics*, Department of Politics, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, November 2017

**Best Graduate Student paper**, awarded by the International Political Sociology Section of the International Studies Association, 2017

**E-International Relations Annual Article Award**, Winner, 2017

**Graduate Student Research Grant** (\$1,500), Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies, UCI. 2017

**Graduate Student Fellowship** (\$4,700), Newkirk Center for Science and Society, UCI. 2016

**Kugelman Research Fellowship** (\$3,000), Center for Citizen Peacebuilding, UCI. 2016

**Recognition of Outstanding Teaching Award**, Department of Political Science, UCI. Fall 2015

**Social Science Teaching Assistant Award 2013-2018** (\$75,510), UCI.

### **Conference Presentations (selected)**

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**Practicing Research Reflexivity: Losing Our ‘Bad Guys,’ Gaining Useful Insights?**

International Studies Association, San Francisco, May 2018

**Re-embodiment Practice Approaches to Investigate Listening in Peacebuilding.** International Studies Association, San Francisco, May 2018

**(How) Does Money Talk or Help You Listen?** European Workshops in International Studies, Cardiff, June 2017

**The Feelings for the Game. How Emotions Shape Listening Practices in Peacebuilding Partnerships.** International Studies Association, Baltimore, February 2017

**Power in Partnership: Analyzing Stories of Internationals in Peacebuilding.** Fifth Intl Conference on Power, Institutions and Authority, Tampere University, August 2016

**Public Spheres on the Move: Studying Democratic Embodied Practices through Biking.** Center for the Study of Democracy, UC Irvine, May 2016

**The Helper – Imperialist, Paternalist or Just a Fool? Analyzing Constructive Roles for External Actors in Peacebuilding.** International Studies Association, Atlanta, March 2016

**The Helper: Using Narratives to Study the Role of External Actors in Peacebuilding.** International Studies Association, Northeast, November 2015

**Peace Research Should Be More Reflexive – But Why and How?** International Studies Association, West, Pasadena, September 2015

### **Teaching Experience**

---

**University of California Irvine**, Irvine, CA. Fall 2013 - Spring 2018

*Graduate Teaching Assistant: Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution, Political Theory, American Government, Critical Thinking, Social Science Honors Core*

**Mälardalen University**, Västerås, Sweden. 1995-1996.

*Lecturer: Environmental Economics*

**Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences**, Uppsala, Sweden. 1995.  
*Teaching Assistant: Ecological Economics*

### **Professional Experience**

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**Head of Planning and Method Development**, January 2013 – present (unpaid study leave, July 2013 – August 2018). *Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden (supporting women’s peacebuilding)*

**Head of Field Operations**, 2009-2012. *Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden*

**Research Consultancies**, 1996-2008. *Various Employers. UK, Sweden, Kosovo*

**Kosovo Coordinator (Pristina-based)**, 2004-2006. *Kvinna till Kvinna, Kosovo*

**Human Rights Project Manager**, 2000-2004. *The Academy of Democracy – Sweden*

**Project Manager Outreach Activities**, 1999. *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*

### **Non-Academic Publications (in Swedish)**

---

“**Disturb My Circles!**” Co-authored chapter in *Dialoguing a New World*. Ordfront Publ, 2015

*We Are the Heart of Serbia*. Editor of book on civil society activism. Silc Publishing, 2008

*Democracy: A Handbook in Theory and Practice*. Editor of training material. 2008

*Freedom, Equality and Citizenship: A Handbook*. Co-author and co-editor. Ordfront, 2000

### **Methodological and Professional Training (selected)**

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#### **Academic Methodological Training**

Gregynog Ideas Lab, Critical Summer School, Wales, (2x5 days), July 2016 and July 2017

Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Syracuse, (10 days), June 2016

International Studies Association – Northeast, Graduate Student Workshop on Interpretive Methodologies, (1 day), 2015

#### **Professional Trainings**

“Advanced Training on Humanitarian Action: Core Training” Sida (5 days), 2007

“Gender and Peace Building” TRANSCEND & The Peace Institute PATRIR (5 days), 2006

“US Trends and Challenges. Looking towards the elections 2008” Study trip (10 days), 2003

# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Emotional is Political:  
Analyzing Listening Practices of ‘Internationals’ in Peacebuilding Partnerships

By

Pernilla Johansson

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Cecelia Lynch, Chair

Why are “international” actors so bad at listening to “local” peacebuilding partners? That internationals should listen to locals is a widely accepted norm in peacebuilding, yet, research consistently documents that local actors do not feel heard. To understand this puzzle, scholars have increasingly focused on ordinary peacebuilding practices, finding that these practices keep internationals separate from local actors and make it harder for them to listen. However, despite the focus on practices as embodied habits and understandings, emotions are usually considered irrelevant. My dissertation challenges this conventional wisdom, arguing that we should pay attention to emotions that international peacebuilding practitioners experience as a key to understanding possibilities of change. Building on research in cognitive science, organizational learning, and political theory, which finds emotions to be a crucial component of listening, I examine over sixty in-depth interviews with INGOs, donors, and researchers in peacebuilding. Based on these interviews, my dissertation makes three main arguments regarding how internationals’ emotions matter to listening in peacebuilding partnerships.

First, internationals’ emotions impact internationals’ ability to listen *receptively*, that is, in a way that is open to new understandings and ways of doing things. Second, analyzing emotions reveals that many peacebuilding practices are still “sticky” with a colonial hierarchy where all the focus is on improving the local actor. Internationals thus keep the privilege of “invisibility” as political actors, leaving their own practices outside explicit contestation. I liken this privilege to an “invisibility cloak” which keeps internationals comfortable and able to carry on as usual without reason to change. And third, the analysis alerts us to emotional consequences for internationals who do attempt change, that is, to break the colonial hierarchy and listen receptively. The accompanying loss of privilege involved in shedding the invisibility cloak and “appearing” as political actors (with stakes in the partnership) involves vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty; the emotional is political.

To make these arguments, I integrate feminist, decolonial, and queer scholarship into practice-based approaches. In addition to practical recommendations for how to develop embodied (personal, organizational, and geopolitical) change strategies, the dissertation provides empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions to several scholarly fields.

## CHAPTER 1: THE LISTENING PUZZLE

### Why are internationals in peacebuilding so bad at listening to local partners, even though they want to and know they should?

“Most painful [in the partnership evaluation], was to hear that we don’t ask [local partners’] advice, because we think we do it all the time, and base everything we do on what they tell us.”

*INGO practitioner during staff discussion on partnership*<sup>1</sup>

This quote from a professional practitioner in an international non-governmental organization (INGO) expresses both a central peacebuilding norm and the difficulty of its implementation. The norm is that of equal partnerships between international actors and their local partners,<sup>2</sup> in which local ownership is key. In other words, internationals should listen to their partners’ advice and “base everything [they] do” on what locals tell them. The difficulty is that their local peacebuilding partners do not experience being listened to. On the contrary, they think internationals do not care for their expertise or opinions. The gap between the normative consensus and its implementation gives rise to the overall research question: Why are internationals so bad at listening, even though they want to and know they should? In this dissertation, I address this gap by examining what I first overlooked, namely the emotions expressed at the beginning of the quote.

There, the speaker states that this gap is nothing less than “painful.” This expression of emotion was ignored by the practitioners themselves – and pushed aside by my interviewees and me (at first) – as beside the “real” point in conversations about partnership. Experiencing and interpreting emotions are simply not considered relevant to being a competent peacebuilding

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were carried out in English, French and Swedish. To keep anonymity, I do not note which quotes were translated (and I use s/he and him/her or pseudonyms).

<sup>2</sup> I use “international” and “local” as distinct categories although this risks reproducing present relations (Richmond and Mitchell 2012).

practitioner. On the contrary, based on my empirical findings, I argue that paying attention to the emotions INGO practitioners experience during their daily activities helps us understand the implementation gap and to identify obstacles to (as well as possibilities for) *receptive listening*, that is, listening likely to be felt by their local partners.

Emotions are relevant to listening because they affect how one perceives things and can process what is heard. In particular, I focus on what INGO practitioners' emotions can tell us about how they perceive who they are and what they do in relation to local partners and to existing norms of peacebuilding. I argue that how they perceive these things makes it easier for them to hear some kinds of input from local partners rather than others, and that this is likely to reproduce rather than change the present state of affairs, where internationals think they listen while locals do not feel heard. As an example, consider the capacity contradiction (identified in Chapter 2). I find that INGOs walk a fine line between praising their local partners' capacity as agents for change, and simultaneously claiming these partners still need vital capacity building by the INGOs themselves. Having to toe this line makes INGOs tensely cling to standard scripts of what "internationals" and "locals" are supposed to know, in order not to lose either partners (by treating them as less than equal) or donors (who may fund capable local actors directly). Thus, the tension discourages INGOs from hearing partners' expressions of needs and capacities outside the accepted scripts. This is one example of how emotions influence INGOs' possibilities to listen receptively.

To make this argument, I will treat emotions as (aspects of) practices,<sup>3</sup> that is, as one aspect alongside others, such as discursive, physical, material, etc. aspects of what practitioners

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<sup>3</sup> My interpretation is open to treating emotions either as practices, "emotional practices," or as aspects of other practices. The distinction is not important to my argument about listening in particular (or later, change in general), and aligns with general practice views that practices intertwine different aspects and themselves can be analyzed as different bundles of practices (Adler and Pouliot 2011b; Bially Mattern 2011).

do. While practice-based approaches have been on the rise in International Relations (IR)<sup>4</sup> the last decade or so, few scholars using this approach explicitly analyze emotional (or embodied) aspects of practices. While foundational texts (Bourdieu 1990) establish the centrality of emotions in practices and their reproduction (rather than change), recent applications (e.g. Adler and Pouliot 2011b) mostly leave emotions aside (for an exception discussed below, see Bially Mattern 2011). There are also few empirical investigations of emotional practices that help us understand international relations. Therefore, I draw on additional traditions in order to analyze my empirical data from interviews and observation with practitioners from three peacebuilding INGOs as well as with their donors and researchers in the field.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, I turn to the well-established and rich knowledge about emotions within feminist, postcolonial/decolonial, and queer research and activist traditions.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, I also aim to contribute to the theoretical capacity of practice-based approaches to analyze emotional (aspects of) practices, here, particularly those related to the listening by INGO peacebuilding practitioners. Together, practice-based and feminist theories help me analyze my data and develop my three main claims.

Simply put, I make three main claims in my dissertation, which broadly follow the three empirical chapters. First, emotions matter to listening (and the lack of it) in peacebuilding practices (Chapter 2). Second, emotions matter because many such practices are still “sticky” with a colonial hierarchy where all the focus is on improving the local actor (Chapter 2). Doing so leaves internationals with the privilege of “invisibility” as political actors (Chapter 3). That is,

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<sup>4</sup> I capitalize IR for the scholarly discipline and use lower case for the study object, that is, the world (which will in this dissertation include parts of the discipline).

<sup>5</sup> I carried out twenty-four interviews with INGOs and an additional thirty-eight with donors and researchers. Most of these were one-on-one talks and fewer than ten were follow-ups.

<sup>6</sup> Naming these traditions together does not mean I see them as homogenous or unitary, but I draw on examples which often work across these labels in an intersectional way. I use “feminist” as a shorthand (except to point out particular works), meaning intersectional feminism unless I explicitly qualify it, as in “white feminism.” For this study I also do not distinguish between post- and decolonial works, building on Bhabra (2014).

what internationals do is taken for granted as “the way we do things” in peacebuilding and placed outside explicit contestation (as opposed to what local actors do, which is constantly questioned and interfered with as a part of the partnerships). This privilege of invisibility thus keeps internationals off the partnership table, comfortable and able to carry on as usual, with their sense of the game, themselves, and the future intact. And third, breaking up the hierarchy means losing their privilege and dealing with the vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty involved (Chapter 4). These emotional consequences keep internationals away from change and hinder them from listening receptively. In other words, the pain expressed in the introductory quote is productive, either reproductive or productive of change, depending on how internationals deal with it.

In order to learn to listen so that local partners feel heard, international actors must acknowledge and learn to handle such emotions, personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. In fact, the findings may be applicable in any attempt for social change which involves equalizing power hierarchies. To reach this conclusion, I start the study below by laying out what is already known about listening in peacebuilding partnerships between international and local actors, the role of emotions in receptive listening (and organizational learning), and about practices and emotions respectively that helps me introduce my take on emotional practices.

Following this review of existing literature is a section on research design which lays out my choices of how to generate and interpret my data. Most of these choices were made before starting the project. However, some were made during the course of the research – including the decision to analyze emotions at all, and how to do so. This was necessary to make sense of the empirical material that emerged through the research which did not fit pre-existing explanations. My aim is also to reflect this process through the chapter structure.



Therefore, as the last section on the chapter outline describes, each empirical chapter contains a two-step analysis. The first step is based on practice approaches (as reviewed below and complemented in each chapter), and the second step adds depth and additional insights by integrating feminist theory. As is probably already clear, the aim of the dissertation is not to “test” a theory which has been prepared before the study starts. Rather, I aim to use theory as bell hooks (1991,1) says, “to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me.” More specifically, to make sense of complex – if ordinary – processes described by practitioners (as quoted in the beginning), and experienced by myself in my own work at a peacebuilding INGO,<sup>7</sup> as I was trying to listen to local actors and “build everything [I] do on what they tell us.”

## **1. What we know and need to know**

There is already considerable knowledge to draw on in the investigation of internationals’ listening practices. Even though few works deal with it directly, many can be combined to gain valuable insights into partnership dynamics. In this section, I outline the main scholarly works I draw on regarding peacebuilding partnerships between international and local actors, listening and learning, as well as practices and emotions. In doing so, I also indicate what related knowledge I think is still needed, that is, relevant research gaps.

In the first subsection (of five), I establish that there is a normative consensus that international peacebuilding actors should listen to local actors in order to secure local ownership and thereby legitimacy and sustainability of peace processes. Second, I contrast this knowledge of the necessity of international listening with research on local actors who, when they partner with international actors, often do not feel heard. These two subsections thus develop the “so-

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<sup>7</sup> I am formally on (unpaid) study leave from one of the INGOs included in the study, more on this in the research design section below.

what?” that is, why we should care about this research. The “so-what?” follows a decolonial logic of placing the concerns of marginalized groups (local partners) at the center, problematizing the practices of the relatively privileged (internationals).

Third, I draw on a diverse set of works to articulate what kind of listening I am focusing on, what I call receptive listening. Receptive listening is basically listening while being open to “understand differently” (Davison 1998) or change one’s own opinion or stance on an issue. These works include political (and social) theory, organizational learning and management literature, and neuroscience, as well as research combining these approaches. Together, these works strongly indicate that listening is about how attention is directed in practice and that emotions are vital in shaping this direction. Fourth, I then briefly examine alternative explanations to the listening gap, before the fifth subsection combines practice approaches with feminist insights regarding emotions. This combination builds on the recognition in Bourdieu’s (1990) foundational work on practice<sup>8</sup> *that* the emotions connected to practices are key to establishing and reinforcing standards of competence, or “rules of the game,” by shaping the actors’ identities and ways of relating to those rules. Integrating feminist insights on *how* emotional (aspects of) practices work on and through subjectivities as well as on and through power structures helps to move the examination forward. In the last subsection, I thus lay the basis for my research design where I draw out these emotional practices of practitioners through in-depth interviews.

A) *Peacebuilding’s normative consensus: internationals should listen to locals*

That international actors cannot “bring” peace to local theaters of war through solutions developed elsewhere is now part of a research consensus. Instead, researchers from otherwise

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu is often cited as one of the key inspirations for one strand of practice research, even though the classification and categorizations differ between scholars (see for example Kustermans 2016; Nicolini 2012).

opposing strands agree, internationals must listen better to local actors (or leave peacebuilding to them completely) if their peacebuilding efforts are to have more legitimate and sustainable effects. Since the 1990s, the massive body of research criticizing “liberal peacebuilding” has documented numerous problems caused by international actors’ lack of contextual knowledge, unrealistic time frames, weak legitimacy, ideologically driven priorities, etc. (e.g. Jabri 2013; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). However, even proponents of liberal peacebuilding have at least since the early 2000s acknowledged that results have been more ambiguous than desired (Call 2008); that relations often reproduce colonial patterns of domination (Paris 2002); and that even the best-case scenarios of combining assumed advantages of internationals (mainly resources and technical knowledge) and locals (mainly legitimacy and contextual knowledge) involve dilemmas (Jarstad and Sisk 2008). Both strands thus acknowledge local agency.

The former, critical, strand has led to findings showing that local responses to interventions are strong enough to produce “hybrid” forms of peace, rather than “liberal” or “indigenous” (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). Meanwhile, the latter, liberal, strand has found that local actors influence the effect of post-conflict elections, constitutional changes and other common liberal measures. This strand has also studied the optimal sequencing of such measures, for example through the institutionalization-before-liberalization approach (IBL), (Paris 2004). Both strands thus conclude that locals’ agency is crucial to outcome and that internationals would do well in listening to them.

This research consensus that internationals should listen to locals also characterizes policy processes. Local ownership has been a priority of high-level conferences on funding for the “Millennium Development Goals” since Rome 2002, as “aid was not producing (sic!) the

development results everyone wanted to see.”<sup>9</sup> For each of the following conferences this priority was further reaffirmed and developed: as the first of five principles in Paris in 2005, as encouraging broader local participation through a civil society focus in Accra in 2008, and as applied to fragile and conflict-affected states in Busan in 2011. The successor process targeting the new “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), or “Agenda 2030,” is even called “The Global *Partnership* for Effective Development Aid<sup>10</sup> (my emphasis). The summary of its second meeting in Nairobi 2016 includes the words “partnership” or “partner” in 12 of the 19 paragraphs and ends with a declaration of “the spirit of partnership” as well as a commitment to “ensure all partners are heard and can steer the work.” The frequency itself indicates that the goal to “ensure all partners are heard” is a new direction.

To further emphasize that partnership involves a break from previous North-South arrangements, the Nairobi document specifies that “the donor-recipient relationships of the past have been replaced by approaches that view all stakeholders as equal and interdependent partners /.../ to achieve the broad vision of increased well-being for people, the planet, prosperity and peace” (1). Policymakers thus agree with researchers that local actors should have more influence than in previous international-local relationships. But what about those who work to put this norm into practice, through peacebuilding and development projects?

It seems beyond doubt that practitioners also embrace the norm of equal partnerships. In *Time to Listen*, based on one of the largest studies of practitioners in development (including peacebuilding projects), Mary B. Anderson and her coauthors draw the conclusion that practitioners from international as well as local organizations strive for mutual partnerships. In their words, there is “wide agreement” (Anderson et al. 2012, 83) that internationals should

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/thehighlevelforaonaideffectivenessahistory.htm>, (last accessed Feb 10, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> <http://effectivecooperation.org/>, (last accessed Feb 10, 2017).

“work through existing [local] institutions where they are strong and support them, if weak, to help them gain experience and resources for bettering their societies.” Despite naming countless problems and dilemmas with such partnerships, the resounding message of the almost 6,000 (international and local) practitioners consulted through *The Listening Project* was that “In Spite of All This, International Aid Providers Should Partner with Local Institutions Anyway!” (2012, 93). In a more recent and in-depth investigation into the partnership narratives of peacebuilding practitioners, Seth B. Cohen (2013) confirm this norm as explicitly held by all sixteen participants, from the North as well as the South. Similarly, in Séverine Autessere’s (2014) ethnography *Peaceland*, based on interviews with hundreds of international practitioners from different countries and types of organizations (governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental) the norm itself is not questioned.

Finally, all the INGO practitioners I interviewed, as well as their three organizations, express strong partnership norms and a commitment to local ownership. Their respective webpage statements that “sustainable peace can only be built by the people living in the area concerned,” “[p]eace can only /.../ be sustainable through the active involvement of the communities in the conflict areas,” and “peaceful solutions to conflict can only be found by involving those who are directly affected by it” illustrate that this is a shared norm.

For any peacebuilding purpose, the normative consensus across research, policy, and practice is thus that local ownership is key and that to achieve it, partnerships must be equal,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Readers may note that these three terms (local ownership, equal partnerships, better listening) are used almost interchangeably in the dissertation. This is correct and reflects the use in practice, which implies they are if not the same thing, at least *moves in the same direction* (from more international influence to more local influence). A more literal reading would imply that “local ownership” means local actors are *more* influential than international actors in any partnerships. I think the literature indicates that partnerships are generally a mix where local and international actors influence different aspects to different degrees, creating highly contextually dependent dynamics. However, the normative agreement I have described establishes that in general international actors have had too much influence and all partnerships should go *in the direction* of more local ownerships of all aspects, that is, toward more equal partnerships, and thus internationals must listen better.

which means that the internationals involved should listen better (than has previously been the norm) to local actors.

*B) Peacebuilding in practice: local actors do not feel heard*

Despite this overwhelming normative support, simply willing partnerships to be more equal does not make them so in practice. As the introductory quote illustrates, while one INGO included in my study think they “base everything we do on what [local partners] tell us,” their local partners, in turn, think that the INGO is uninterested in their advice. This is not a unique case but a well-documented finding from the practice-based peacebuilding research cited above. Anderson et al. (2012), Cohen (2013), and Autessere (2014) all find that one of the greatest concerns of the local actors they interview is the perceived inability and/or disinterest of their international partners to take their expertise and experience seriously, that is, to *listen* to them and take what they say into account. Not surprisingly, local actors interpret this as disrespect and arrogance, which decreases trust and undermines cooperation necessary for sustainable results.

The six year long “Listening Project” reported in *Time to Listen* (Anderson et al. 2012) highlights numerous situations and forms in which local actors encounter non-listening internationals. The authors connect many of these to an overall logic of “delivery” within the international aid system (2012, 38-41). For example, local actors feel that their own problem-solving capacities are ignored by internationals who focus on what is missing in conflict-affected (and other aid recipient) societies as this represents “needs” that can be met through “deliverables.” Even among such “needs,” agencies have a tendency to hear only those that fit with what *they* can deliver rather than try to understand the situation holistically.

In addition, international actors often work with short project periods and themselves commission evaluations about their own delivery rather than participate in collaborative assessments with local actors analyzing effects over the long term. In line with research

recommendations, local actors expect internationals to adapt support depending on the context and to even out rather than reinforce inequalities between international and local partners (2012, 84-92). However, the “Listening Project” shows that there is widespread disappointment as internationals often do the contrary on both counts. That is, internationals ignore particular political histories that shape how local actors are perceived in their societies. Additionally, internationals push local actors to develop into administrative “middlemen” that serve higher placed actors in a donor-driven distribution chain for “deliverables” rather than strengthening their identity as civil society actors connected to their community (at national or lower levels). In other words, the local peacebuilding actors included in the “Listening Project” do not feel heard by their international partners on key issues.

Cohen’s (2013) dissertation research on in-depth partnership narratives by both Southern and Northern<sup>12</sup> peacebuilding NGO practitioners similarly shows how Southern activists struggle to be heard by their Northern partners. On the one hand, all of the Southern practitioners interviewed report positive experiences from partnering with internationals, including experiencing moments of control over decision-making in the partnership. Such control is what local partners value most according to Cohen’s summary of what matters most for successful partnerships (2013, 326-7).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, such moments or relationships where their international partners have shown respect for their models and methodologies, asked open questions before (or rather than) suggesting alternatives, and left the decision-making to them,

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<sup>12</sup> Cohen (2013, 2) uses the terminology of “outsider-Northerners (from North America & Western Europe) [who] work with insider-locals in the global South (nations in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, for example).” While I use North and South in the same way, my analysis will show (see particularly Chapter 4) why we differ on whether Northern is an “outsider” position (Cohen’s use) or not (my use).

<sup>13</sup> Cohen (2013) presents different summaries which “top” with different issues, but I do not see this as a problem as they overlap to a great extent. For example, on p. 304 mutuality/reciprocity comes first; on pp. 326-7 he distinguishes between his Northern and Southern interviewees who respectively prioritize successful outcomes and local decision-making control; and on pp. 366-7 “Shared Vision and Purpose” tops a list of seven points, which ends with “mutuality/reciprocity.”

are told as exceptional stories. Despite long (sometimes decades-long) partnership experience, these local peacebuilders are more used to the opposite, that is, that international partners push them to make decisions they do not want to, push for particular solutions or models, or simply disregard their knowledge and experience.

Finally, Autessere forcefully demonstrates that the status of what local actors know is systematically devalued through many ordinary “practices, habits, and narratives” (2014, 29) that international peacebuilders take for granted. In her ethnography of this “community of practice” that she names “Peaceland,” she includes actors as diverse as military peacekeepers, civilian staff from inter-governmental organizations, as well as civil society actors like NGO and INGO activists. Autessere starts from the puzzling observation that these internationals on a daily basis ignore lessons promoting local ownership, context sensitivity, good relationships with local actors, etc., yet these often “well-meaning /.../ well-read, and well-educated people” (2014, 5) are often surprised when their efforts worsen the situation.

For example, common practices such as recruiting only international staff as managers, rating formal and technical expertise over experiential and contextual knowledge, traveling by car instead of by foot, and many other mundane work (and off-work) habits lead to fewer opportunities for internationals to listen to and value local expertise. In a chapter on “local reactions” (2014, 97-114), Autessere shows how these ways of working are perceived as “arrogant,” “condescending,” “paternalistic,” “fundamentally disrespectful,” “bossy,” and “preachy” (2014, 97-98) by local peacebuilders and populations who do not feel that what they know is heard and respected by their international counterparts.



Despite the normative consensus for better international listening described in the previous subsection, the practice-based research<sup>14</sup> presented here has thus found that local actors in peacebuilding do not feel heard by their international partners.

*C) Peacebuilding in question: do internationals even want to listen?*

There is thus a gap between the norm that internationals should listen and its implementation in practice(s). The practice-based research cited above is providing insights on obstacles to listening in practitioners' everyday, highlighting factors such as funding-related administration, recruitment criteria, security routines, etc. But what if practitioners simply do not want to listen? Are there other explanations? Below, I briefly point to some alternative explanations, and put the question into the context of a wider scholarship on international-local relations in peacebuilding and development. I conclude that while all of these may provide a piece of the puzzle, there are still internationals who do want to listen but do not seem to succeed. As the introductory quote shows, some are even so convinced they are doing so that being questioned is experienced as "the most painful" critique that partners can raise. Pushing further to examine why even internationals who "really want to and think they should" listen do not succeed should help us understand more about conditions that restrict – and perhaps also facilitate – listening. Before going into how feelings involved in everyday practices can shape such conditions, a brief look at the alternatives follows.

First, Autessere goes through three types of alternative explanations to what makes internationals in peacebuilding ignore local actors and expertise, even though this is found to

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<sup>14</sup> Only Autessere explicitly uses a practice-based approach with theoretical references to theorists on practical knowledge (including Bourdieu 1990, and Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001) and to the current "practice turn" in International Relations (e.g. Adler and Pouliot 2011b; Bigo 2011; Hopf 2010; Leander 2011). However, I include both Cohen's (2013) and Anderson et al. (2012) as they focus on practitioners' own sense-making and everyday experiences and recommendations. In this strand of practice-based peacebuilding research I would also include examples such as Hug (2016) and Helmuller (2018). They also all have experience from working as practitioners, which may motivate their insistence on the relevance of practice.

create “inefficient, ineffective, or even counter-productive” outcomes (2014, 9).<sup>15</sup> The three explanations focus on constraints (such as limited local capacity), vested interests (in certain solutions), and ideological factors (pushing for a liberal market-based system). However, she refutes all three as incomplete explanations, as there is too much similarity across different local contexts and types of interests, as well as too little ideological motivation to explain everyday practices that internationals often recognize as counter-productive. This gap motivates her focus on peacebuilding *practices* in particular, a focus I share given the normative consensus and listening gap, while drawing on a wider scholarship about peace and development work.

Second, much of this broader literature on development, civil society, and peacekeeping lay out continuities in international-local relations today from colonial hierarchies (e.g. Mosse 2005; Nordstrom 1997; Redfield 2013; Rieff 2002). However, they rarely address the role emotions play in connecting practitioners’ banal tasks with historical structures that the same practitioners aim to counteract. The same can be said for research on international-local civil society cooperation in democratization, peacebuilding, and development, which otherwise cover both positive and negative aspects of such partnerships. On the one hand, the value of international allies to local civil society finds strong support across conflict-cases, in Eastern European transitions, and in African post-conflict settings (Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Paffenholz 2010; Tripp et al. 2009). These studies stress benefits to local partners of INGO funding, connections to advocacy networks, and creation of spaces where they can learn from others within and across conflict contexts. On the other hand, INGOs can be problematic partners for locals (Belloni 2008; Millar 2014; Verkoren and Van Leeuwen 2013). These works highlight the tendency of INGOs to disregard local expertise and methods in favor of their own templates and

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<sup>15</sup> While Autessere’s question is not explicitly about listening, I think the gist of her question is close enough.

to prioritize accountability towards their own donors rather than to local partners, which I also find (in Chapters 2 and 3) shape their listening.

In peacekeeping research, even the terminology used indicates a tendency to downplay local perspectives, despite what is said. For example, in a review of peacekeeping research, Fortna and Howard point out that the perspectives of the populations where peacekeeping is “done” are rarely included. While this seems to suggest a recognition of local actors as agents, the impression is negated by the terminology of the article. While internationals are interpellated as active subjects, the local population is treated as passive and called the ““peacekept”” (2008, 294). Despite placing the term in citation marks, such language suggests that (at least “international”) researchers may share practitioners’ orientation toward local actors as being objects “done to” rather than as “doers.” Chapter 4 explores this shared orientation in more depth. In sum, this wider scholarship suggests the importance of looking into historical hierarchies between Northern and Southern actors and connect these to practitioners’ everyday.

Third, I address three other objections raised to me by research colleagues, concerning actors’ intentions and ethics as possible explanations for why local actors do not feel heard. One such objection is “What if internationals just *pretend to listen* but really think they know best, and therefore ignore any input from local partners?” While this is certainly possible, like Autessere who finds many internationals in Peaceland “well-meaning,” I think many do want to listen – and that we can learn from understanding their conditions for doing so.

Another objection instead puts the local in question, asking “What if local partners just *pretend to not feel heard*, as part of strategic maneuvering for a better bargaining position?” This is certainly also possible. However, again I refer to the practice-based research cited above where so many local practitioners were also included, expressing frustration and desperation to be

heard, in focus groups, and in-depth interviews, across the globe. There is enough evidence to assume that a vast number of local peacebuilders actually do not feel heard, despite many of their INGOs partners really wanting to listen.

A final objection is that INGOs and other *internationals should get out* of peacebuilding completely. This argument assumes that any positive effects of international peacebuilding cannot counter the negative consequences reported above. While this may be the case, my starting point is that changing practices is more realistic as a step towards either more equal partnerships or transforming/ending international peacebuilding as we know it today. This is because there are many practitioners reproducing “peacebuilding” every day by just going about their daily business. Rather than just rejecting their involvement in international relations completely<sup>16</sup> my research aims to understand how changing their practices may contribute to overall change. To make my research as directly relevant to those carrying out such practices (found to be problematic) rather than taking the common detour via abstract policymakers, I take my starting point in precisely these practices.

Thus, complementing these existing explanations and objections, my dissertation project aims to gain a practice-based understanding of when and how obstacles and possibilities for listening appear to practitioners, which conditions help and hinder, and what this can tell us about the possibilities for change of international-local partnerships. Interviewing practitioners about their daily practices, my gradual realization that a lot of emotions were expressed but routinely pushed aside forced me to dig deeper into what role (if any) emotions can have in listening practices. As it turns out, they are quite central. Particularly, current research

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<sup>16</sup> In addition, one can ask why these particular relations between internationals and locals should just be cut off, in the light of, for example, corporate, political, and family relations keeping the world intertwined and likely including many similar dynamics and hierarchies.

establishes that emotions are crucial for receptive listening, not least across political status divides such as those between international and local actors, and in organizational learning. In the next subsection, I therefore present a brief review of such research establishing that emotions matter for listening.

*D) Listening practices: emotions matter!*

To understand what it would mean for internationals to listen better to their local partners, in this section, I turn to literature on listening in politics and organizations.<sup>17</sup> What are the qualities of listening that enables the listener not just to endure the speaker's turn, but to take in what is said with the possibility to "understand differently" (Davison 1998), to learn something? While this may sound easy, research shows that it is actually a rare occurrence. Instead, people tend to process what they hear in ways that reinforce their previous beliefs, even when presented with opposing facts and worldviews (Button 2016, 267-9). However, if local ownership is to be more than a buzzword and make a practical difference to peacebuilding, listening must mean that internationals learn to understand something differently and become prepared to do some things differently in practice. I call this *receptive listening*, drawing on the literature presented below, which establishes that emotions are crucial for facilitating or impeding such receptivity. In other words, while pushing emotions aside may be taken for granted by peacebuilding professionals when they focus on partnership, doing so may also be one reason why this partnership eludes them.

Political theorist Andrew Dobson attributes the focus on speaking in political theory to "the moment at which Aristotle defined the political animal as an animal with the capacity for

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<sup>17</sup> My study does not treat listening as only a sound phenomenon but as a political act, which is about paying attention in intersubjective communication and making yourself open to change because of what you hear (even though the physical aspects of hearing can also influence your reception), see further Farinati and Firth (2017), particularly Chapter 3 "Towards a Politics of Voices."

reasoned *speech*” (2014, 6, emphasis added). He claims that this has led to listening being “consistently ignored as a topic worthy of analysis by political theorists in general” (2014, 6), despite being a somewhat obvious necessity if the reasoned speech is to have any effect on the political process in which it takes place or the outcome it is referring to. While many theorists, in politics and other disciplines, have recognized the power inequalities in who is listened to and theorized how marginalized voices and groups can strengthen their voices<sup>18</sup> to be heard, fewer have examined the conditions for listening outside of the sphere of private, or one-on-one relationships.<sup>19</sup> One of the key works in political theory on listening is by Susan Bickford who explicitly discusses “political listening.”

Unlike listening in private relationships, Bickford describes “political listening” as listening which is “not primarily a caring or amicable practice” but one that “takes conflict and differences seriously and yet allows for joint action” (1996, 2, all quotes). Setting out to identify the characteristics of political listening, Bickford reflects that she “cannot escape the concept of openness [...] some version of “being open to”” (1996, 146) and that it necessarily has a “receptive quality” in the sense of “an active involvement in a joint project (1996, 144, both quotes). Thus, in terms of my research, that peacebuilding internationals listen should not simply mean that they provide spaces or times or trainings which enable local partners to speak. Instead, they must also be *receptive* to what their partners say, to “take[] conflict and differences seriously” and be *open* to change any peacebuilding project, if it is to be a truly *joint* one. These are challenging propositions for many international actors (including donors) who, despite their

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<sup>18</sup> Strengthening marginalized voices is a key concern in works from feminist, postcolonial, and queer perspectives that I draw on later in the dissertation. It is also a focus of social movements research, where (mainly) sociologists have for at least two decades discussed how emotions are relevant for movements’ effectiveness in mobilization and claims-making (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001), but less so how emotions influence those who are targets of the claims of the movement and in a relatively privileged position.

<sup>19</sup> Although I take issue with Dobson’s way of distinguishing between private and public spheres, it is valuable to consider different purposes and settings when examining listening.

normative commitments, handle peacebuilding in practice as project management of known inputs to achieve known outputs (Eyben 2005) rather than the complex, unpredictable, and thus political process their policy documents acknowledge.<sup>20</sup>

But how would we even know whether we are moving in the direction of such receptivity for politics? What would an “operationalization” of receptivity look like? Bickford admits that this quality, or involvement, is difficult to observe (for example, she rejects silence, question-posing, and arguing, as signs which are just as likely to signal domination). However, despite the lack of external indicators she insists that “most of us can recall times when we genuinely *felt* heard [as] [b]eing listened to is an *experience* we have in the world” (Bickford 1996, 157, emphasis added and removed). Emotions are thus central to the speaker’s experience of the *receptive listening* that is key to equal partnerships across differences in status and resources (or in the words of the Nairobi document on Global Partnership, across “the donor-recipient relationships of the past”). Now, I turn to two recent studies that particularly examine the emotions of the *listener*.

Building on the concept of listening developed by Bickford and others,<sup>21</sup> Emily Beausoleil’s (2014) examination of “The Politics, Science, and Art of Receptivity” follows the development of a performance of interactive theater on homelessness. This project managed to move seasoned representatives from established institutions out of their rut of ineffective activities into new understandings and cooperative relationships – similarly to what peacebuilding actors try to achieve through equal partnerships. To explain why this project could

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<sup>20</sup> I get back to the notion of “political” (as in open-ended, contested, and uncertain) processes as opposed to administrative or technical ones (as instrumental, with predetermined goals) at the end of Chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> Including Spivak (1996) and Ahmed (2000) who work in the postcolonial feminist tradition which has contributed much insight on power in hierarchical communication, focusing on when subaltern voices are marginalized and *not* listened to.

succeed in creating what certainly fits Bickford's description of "an active involvement in a joint project," Beausoleil draws on neuroscience and political theory. First, she uses research which establishes that affect is a vital part of cognition to argue that affective elements are necessary for receptive listening, as without them, we will simply not be *moved* to the "openness" that Bickford prescribes. Second, she argues that to cultivate receptivity, such affective experiences must be competently mediated, as they are otherwise likely to lead to defensiveness and closure.

Another recent study that testifies to the power of affective experiences to increase people's responsiveness to their co-workers is Julia Romanowska's (2014) dissertation *Improving Leadership Through the Power of Art and Music*. Comparing managers following two different management courses, one renowned traditional program with standard models and tools and one art-based program exposing managers to dark and often upsetting emotional experiences, Romanowska finds striking differences. While the "traditional" managers rated themselves as more able to handle complex situations and to respond to ethical dilemmas after the course, their co-workers not only disagreed in qualitative assessments but also exhibited higher levels of stress hormones. On the contrary, the "art" managers who had been exposed to human suffering (fragmented accounts read to disharmonic music collages) without cookie-cutter solutions rated themselves more humbly than before. Meanwhile, their co-workers estimated them as *more* able and likely to take action and responsibility in difficult work situations, and also exhibited lower levels of stress hormones. The way the "art" managers experienced and acknowledged affect thus enabled them to listen more receptively and act more responsively in relation to their lower-status co-workers, qualities that could shift peacebuilding partnerships towards more equality.



If receptive listening is “understanding differently,” then organizational learning is its organizational version. There are many findings in organizational research which support the relevance of emotions for promoting or obstructing learning. For example, a meta-study on nine dissertations of organizational learning summarizes the findings as follows:

“There can be forces within the organizations that want to hinder learning. The reasons for this can be *a desire* for power and control. *Anxiety, fear, and pain* can also make up underlying obstacles to learning. Additional causes can be expected changes that may result from the activities. *Fear of conflict, shame, guilt, and laziness* can also obstruct learning.” (Magnusson 2007, 19, my emphases and translation)

If feelings like fear, anxiety, and shame hinder learning, these studies also establish that feelings of safety facilitate the openness that learning new things require, as “[p]eople who feel unsafe are not particularly prone to share knowledge” (Magnusson 2007, 19). Consequently, the resulting recommendations from the meta-study emphasize creating regular arenas for common reflection and analysis, not only to create a common view on purpose and results, but to get used to dealing with conflicting views (echoing Bickford’s “political listening”). As none of the nine studies deals with a peacebuilding organization, I now look at one of the few organizational examinations that does.

Finally, I turn to Susanna Campbell’s (2012) massive examination of *Organizational Barriers to Change: Agency and Structure in International Peacebuilding*. Campbell does not explicitly tackle emotions, but her study still contains valuable lessons on conditions for learning. She builds on organizational research and her own practitioner experience to examine five international organizations of different types and how they manage or (mostly) fail to adapt through six critical junctures over thirteen years of peacebuilding processes in Burundi. Campbell finds that learning that leads to change is rare (as predicted by organization research), and that the most adaptive organizations in her study shared three characteristics (2012, ii): they

focused on peacebuilding; they had leaders who were “willing to coerce the organization” into new behavior; and they combined technical knowledge with knowledge of the context. The last point reminds us of Autessere’s findings in *Peaceland*, that internationals’ are assumed to possess thematic knowledge which is usually deemed superior to contextual knowledge assumed to be held by local actors.

For my study, I take Campbell’s findings to indicate that strong leadership mindful of core aims can improve organizational listening and thereby increase peacebuilding effectiveness, by crucially putting technical and contextual knowledge on more equal footing status-wise within their organizations. Particularly important, the emphasis on the need to “coerce” the organization into change is a relevant reminder of the energy and cost it takes to create change or go against the community mainstream, which will be relevant when we get to the sections on emotional costs for change and strategies for dealing with them, in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

These findings on the role of emotions in listening and/as learning do not suggest that authoritarianism should be a new ideal for peacebuilding organizations or that their managers should enroll in programs of affective art experiences (although the latter may be a good idea, depending on how they are set up). However, these studies provide new insights into what we need to pay attention to in order to understand how listening practices works in peacebuilding INGOs. How do mundane practices facilitate or impede hearing their local partners, given present status differences? The research on listening and learning cited above gives cause to be attentive not only to what practitioners do and say everyday, but also to how they feel about it. Therefore, in the following subsection, I explain what literature I draw on for my practice-based investigation into internationals’ listening and how it motivates my treatment of emotions as relevant (aspects of) practices.

*E) From practices and emotions to emotional practices*

So far in this chapter, I have established that despite the normative peacebuilding consensus that internationals should listen to locals, this is not happening to the extent that locals feel heard *in practice*. I have also reviewed alternative explanations and research laying out different ways *practices* influence how we are able to listen receptively through the way they work on/with/through our emotions. In this subsection, I clarify what I mean with practices and what literature I draw on to do so. I also go into what basis this literature gives for studying emotions as part of practices even though it rarely theorizes, empirically investigates, or in some cases even mentions emotions. Throughout the dissertation I develop my treatment of emotions as relevant (aspects of) listening practices by integrating insights on emotions from feminist traditions, and the following paragraphs take the first steps in laying the foundations for my way of conceptualizing a practice-based approach which includes attention to emotions.

A practice-based approach to partnerships means placing practitioners' ordinary work at the center of the inquiry. While other social sciences turned their attention to practices decades ago (see for example Lugones and Spelman 1983; Ortner 1984; and Rouse 2006), much political science has concentrated on particular actors or systems until the recent burst<sup>22</sup> of work inspired by "practice theory."<sup>23</sup> As in other disciplines, much practice-oriented work in IR – including mine – is inspired by Bourdieu's work on "the logic of practice" which is also the title of his main (1990) book on the topic (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 2011b; Bigo 2011; Leander 2002).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sometimes these bursts have been called "turns" to "practice" and to "emotions"/"affect." While thinking in "turns" can be a helpful heuristic, it is not important for my argument and I recognize that naming starting points can have consequences in making some works more central than others (Ahmed 2014, Afterword).

<sup>23</sup> I use the term "practice-based approach" to avoid the discussion of whether there is any (or indeed one coherent) practice "theory" (see for example Ringmar's (2014) critique), which is not relevant for my purposes.

<sup>24</sup> For a book-length treatment of different practice approaches, see Nicolini (2012). For a recent article suggesting categories for different practice-based work in IR, see Kustermans (2016).

As the title implies, one of Bourdieu's main claims is that any practice has its own logic which is different from the theoretical logic that can be constructed by anyone studying it from the outside. To me, the practitioner-scholars cited above help us understand more of that practical logic – what they do and why – by examining how practitioners themselves experience partnerships and the effects that has on peacebuilding overall. I aim to contribute by zooming in on how internationals' everyday practices, particularly the emotions involved, shape and are shaped by conditions for listening receptively to local partners. Therefore, I will briefly go through Bourdieu's view of how emotions are relevant to establishing and reproducing (rather than challenging) the practical logic of a field.

To understand the practical logic of peacebuilding partnerships, it may seem far-fetched to turn to rugby, Bourdieu's favorite sport. However, Bourdieu (1990) compares practices in a social field (such as peacebuilding, academia, an industry, etc.) to moves in a game, pointing out that the practical logic of making moves while *playing* a game is different from the theoretical logic through which you can understand a game by *observing* it. Take rugby for example: what makes sense when you are running up the left field, clutching the ball, knowing your team mates, the ground, the score, and feeling the previous games in your body, might not make sense to the observer on the tenth bench with her distant overview over all the players' physical positions and their recent performance statistics. The player who gets the pass makes a decision in a split second, based on a tacit, embodied, and *practical* knowledge, or “feel for the game” (66).

In the same way, participants in social games (work meetings, family dinners, or any social situation) employ tacit knowledge that is developed through participation and socialization, and informed by real stakes – that is, the outcome matters to them concretely, as actors in the game. Saying that the stakes matter is just another way of saying that they “feel”

important to the player. On the contrary, anyone who is not taking part may be oblivious to why it was important at that moment to pass the ball to the new team mate, to pretend you did not hear your uncle's racist comment, or to give your local peacebuilding partners a break to discuss different wines (see Elsa's story, Chapter 3). While Bourdieu does not go into detail on how to study emotions, he does repeatedly stress their utmost importance. Emotions are crucial in shaping our dispositions (what Bourdieu calls *habitus*), that is, our embodied learning of what practices are competent (appropriate) moves in different settings.

To give just a few Bourdieusian examples showing emotions as inseparable from (other aspects of) practices and expressing a practical knowledge, or “feel for the game,” of what you should or should not do, let's start at one kind of beginning: childhood. “Early experiences have particular weight” (Bourdieu 1990, 60) as this is when we learn, not just about the world, but about our place in the world and how we best survive in it. Our closest social community, often the family,<sup>25</sup> is our teacher and the emotions involved signal the stakes. Lessons learned do not have to be articulated verbally and may even be more effective before we have words for them. Instead, “highly charged with affectivity,” they become “buried in the deepest level of the body” (Bourdieu 2000, 167, both quotes). For example, a black boy growing up in a racist environment learns about the boundaries he is not supposed to cross “through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. He does not know what the boundary is, and he can get no explanation of it, which is terrifying enough, but the fear he hears in the voices of his elders is more frightening still.”<sup>26</sup> The power of

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<sup>25</sup> Not assuming any particular kind of family.

<sup>26</sup> Excerpt from James Baldwin's novel *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993) as cited by Bourdieu (2000, 170).

emotions converts any “law of the social body” (here, racism) “into the law of the [individual’s] body,” (2000, 179, both quotes). Emotions thus work to shape the subject in line with his/her position in the social order.

Further, the effects of our emotionally charged learning “can survive long after the disappearance of their social conditions” (Bourdieu 2000, 180). In other words, as the boy grows up, the boundaries inscribed through “the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear,” will be a part of how he interprets what happens in the world, perhaps for the rest of his life. Regardless of changes in the “social law,” the “law of [his] body” can continue shaping what he thinks “cannot be done” or “cannot *not* be done” by someone in his position (2000, 146, both quotes, emphasis in original). In my study, I ask what practitioners’ emotions say about their embodied (rather than verbally articulated) knowledge about how the world works and their position in it, about who listens to who and how to make sense of how to respond.

Therefore, the way emotions inscribe lessons about the world into the body is particularly powerful, because the body is our instrument for understanding the world. As our concrete instrument, it is also our body that is vulnerable to the world, “faced with the risk of emotion, lesion, suffering, sometimes death” (Bourdieu 2000, 140) in response to which our practical knowledge develops. Not only can feelings signal the risks involved in making the wrong assessment of what works but feeling itself is risky. While making mistakes may make you the target of practical sanctions from the community in question, you also risk emotional sanctions. Significantly, Bourdieu points out that of these risks, “*nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being*” (2000, 140, emphasis added). Therefore, my study asks about emotions involved in deviating from the present norms of peacebuilding practice, that is, in attempting to listen receptively.

As a final example of the link between practices and emotions, Bourdieu emphasizes that when someone tries to make those rules explicit, to articulate the rules of the game, her body is still her main instrument to form that knowledge. For example, someone may want to explicate the rules of the game to change them (say, as a practitioner who wants to listen better) or to understand the dynamics better (say, as a researcher investigating a puzzling gap). Such attempts, any attempt, to understand a practice goes through her own practices and is processed through her body, shaped by particular lessons about the world (say, that aims such as change and understanding are desirable.) Therefore, any interpretation is necessarily a product of a perspective from a particular position in (social and physical) space. This makes Bourdieu's view of scientific knowledge distinct from what he calls the "distant, lofty gaze" from an imagined neutral point that the "scholastic view" (2000, 22) often claims to be. However, in his view, the knowledge produced is still scientific, in fact even more so, as long the researcher explicitly takes into account the particular features of practical logics (both her own and that of her study objects), including its embodied and affective aspects. In my study, I attempt to do so both by paying attention to the emotions expressed by the practitioners I study, and by reflexivity<sup>27</sup> regarding my own embodied position and process.

This brief introduction to Bourdieu's work on practice has provided reasons for *why* studying practices, including emotions connected to them, may improve our understanding of INGO listening. Before turning to the methodological implications, the *how*, in the research design section below, *what* are we to study more specifically, that is, what are practices?

Adler and Pouliot, who have made efforts to promote a "practice turn" in IR with an article (2011a) and edited volume (2011b), define practices as "competent performances"

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<sup>27</sup> More on reflexivity in the Research design section below as well as in the analysis sections in Chapter 4.

(2011a). They further specify five characteristics of practices (2011b, 7-8, all following quotes, emphases in original) as (1) processes that “constitute[] the flow of history.” These processes are (2) patterned, that is, they “exhibit certain regularities over time and space” and are (3) deemed as either competent or incompetent (that is, if they are competent they are practices, if not, they are deemed unintelligible, inappropriate, and irrelevant to the game) by an audience, such as a community of fellow practitioners. Practice further “relies on [4] *background knowledge* which it embodies, enacts, and reifies, all at once” and this knowledge is often implicit and taken for granted among practitioners. This means that competent practitioners will usually recognize a common meaning in what other competent practitioners do and say. In turn, doing and saying things in certain ways contains a claim to know “how things are,” that is, to know about the rules of the game, and how the world works. As both “doing” (material) and “saying” (discursive) are part of practices, practice thus (5) “weaves together the *discursive and material* worlds” and involves acting both “in and on the world.”<sup>28</sup> However, while their definition is built on Bourdieu’s work, there is nothing explicitly about emotions in the definition, leaving me with little guidance on how to move forward with investigating them empirically.

In fact, there is nothing that explicitly deals with emotional (aspects of) practices or how to study them in either the article or their introduction to the edited volume (2011a, 2011b). This is despite their Bourdieusian focus on socially assessed performances that “embodies, enacts, and reifies” the subject’s implicit “background knowledge” about the rules of the social order.<sup>29</sup>

However, they are not alone in leaving emotions out of practices. The only contribution in their

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<sup>28</sup> For example, if the boy grown up in a racist society acts “appropriately” within those boundaries, he is not only acting *in* the world but reinforces the existing rules, thus also acting *on* the world (inevitably, regardless of intention). If he acts as if racism does not exist, he may be deemed acting inappropriately and be dismissed as outside the game (as mad, a foreigner, or some other exceptional status) which may work *on* the world for change or reproduction, depending on the reactions of the audience.

<sup>29</sup> It may be tempting to assess this as an expression of the taken-for-granted background knowledge that emotions do not belong in scholarly texts, but I will not pursue this temptation further here.



edited volume that treats emotions in-depth is that of Janice Bially Mattern. Bially Mattern establishes, first, that there is a “burgeoning body of research [on] the role of emotion in a wide range of global political dynamics” (2011, 65), then that “[e]motion scholars across disciplines often imply that emotions have something to do with practices” (2011, 70). Despite this, “the connection between emotion and practice has been made mostly in casual ways” (2011, 70), which she attempts to rectify by explicitly theorizing emotions *as* practices. Despite these similarities<sup>30</sup> in our approaches, I find her approach more directed towards figuring out *what emotions are*. My study is more concerned with *how emotions may work*<sup>31</sup> to produce (or change) particular aspects of the social order, such as unequal partnerships between international and local actors in peacebuilding.

Therefore, I turn instead to insights on emotions and embodiment from feminist approaches to make sense of the empirical data generated in my project. These traditions of research and activism have for decades generated knowledge that works across the same four “entrenched dichotomies in social theorizing” that Adler and Pouliot claim a practice approach can bridge (2011b, 13). While Adler and Pouliot claim a practice framework can *bridge* these aspects, social movements have long rejected the dichotomous either/or construction itself, instead treating them as both/and, as I briefly illustrate below.

First, material and meaning-making aspects of what agents do are intertwined. Practices do things “in and on the world,” but what those doings mean materially depends on culture and

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<sup>30</sup> We similarly think emotions can be treated as practices, based on the intertwining of bodily, cognitive, and social elements, and through different paths end up with emotions as practices that, in her words, “do human being” (Bially Mattern 2011, 81) and, in my words, are necessary for politics (Chapter 4). Differences are mainly that she finds Bourdieu too much of a deterministic structuralist and therefore turns to Theodore Schatzki, whereas I think there is room for more than structure in Bourdieu’s work (as does Leander 2011). Also, I find her model less useful to studying particular purposeful action, as she sees agency as an effect of a subject’s emotional practices (2011, 74).

<sup>31</sup> My approach is thus more aligned with Gregory and Åhäll (2015), which also contains a review of works on emotions in IR.

interpretation, as willed by the slogan “We’re here, we’re queer – get used to it.” I read this slogan as a call to mainstream culture (society’s “background knowledge”) to change its interpretation and material reactions to queer practices. Second, individual and structural divides are rejected in the feminist call “The personal is political.” Third, observing an objective background is not incompatible with normative and reflexive stances, as a common definition of (many) feminism(s) recognizes both “the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified.”<sup>32</sup> Fourth, continuity and change are not mutually exclusive. Many feminist support groups in the 70s took this as their motivation to combine their efforts to change society with mutual support for each other to deal with a great deal of continuity in how things still are.<sup>33</sup> Despite these long traditions of developing know-how bridging these dichotomies so entrenched in other research strands, feminist, de-/postcolonial, and queer traditions seem overlooked by many practice-based researchers, as recently pointed out by Lauren Wilcox (2017).

Therefore, I draw on intersectional feminist works to analyze how emotional (aspects of) INGO practices in peacebuilding partnerships shape and are shaped by the conditions for listening to their local partners. I will particularly use Sara Ahmed’s work,<sup>34</sup> introducing insights from one of three books for the analysis in each of the empirical chapters. Chapter 2 uses Ahmed’s conceptualization of emotions as shaped socially and historically, from *The Cultural*

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<sup>32</sup> Susan James (1998) as cited on <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics/>.

<sup>33</sup> Ignoring feminist (or post-/decolonial or queer) works is neither new, nor unique to practice researcher or political scientists, but has been noted in relation to early practice approaches (Ortner 1984), anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991), and critical security studies (McLeod 2015). There may be other examples of which I am not aware.

<sup>34</sup> Using Ahmed is one reason why I do not distinguish between feelings, emotions, and affect as is common in much recent work on “affect” (see Shouse 2005). Not only is the distinction not important to my purpose, I also agree with Ahmed that using it can serve to reinforce preconceived notions of what comes “before” and “after,” what is “real” and not in a way rejected by the feminist, postcolonial, and queer works that I use (see Ahmed 2014, Afterword). It could even be fruitful to study this attempt to create a subfield (of “affect” studies) as a part of the struggle over what is in/competent theory, and what is achieved by side-stepping earlier feminist work on emotions.

*Politics of Emotion* (2014). Chapter 3 uses her work on how emotions orient our attention toward or away from different objects, from *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Finally, Chapter 4 uses Ahmed's work to discuss obstacles and costs as well as resources for purposeful (or willful, in her terminology) change actors, from *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). In addition to analyzing my empirical data, this step-by-step approach also aims to illustrate more specifically how feminist insights can be integrated into practice approaches and what can be gained, developing the theoretical contribution of the dissertation.

To sum up, in this section on "What we know and need to know," I have developed the main puzzle motivating the dissertation. I did so by establishing the normative consensus among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners that internationals need to listen better to their local peacebuilding partners and reviewing research which finds that these partners do not feel heard in practice. Doing so led to the overall research question "Why are internationals so bad at listening to their local partners, even though they want to and know they should?" Drawing on interdisciplinary research on listening, I have further established that emotional (aspects of) practices are likely to influence the conditions for receptive listening, which has not received much attention in research on peacebuilding partnership practices. Finally, going more in-depth into practice literature, which establishes the importance of emotions but not how to study them, has motivated me to integrate feminist theory to analyze the empirical data generated along the course of the research project. Thus equipped to start the project, in the following section I describe the research design.

## **2. Research design**

Having established the overall listening puzzle above, as well as the likely relevance of emotions, this section turns to how I went about the research project methodologically. It

explains the approach I took to generating and interpreting my data, concrete choices I made before and during the project, as well as methodological challenges in interpreting the relationship between emotions and receptive listening. The section is thus a concrete illustration of trying to articulate research practices as practices, making sense of how (even whether) concrete options on what to do and not to do seem appropriate or not. As we learnt from Adler and Pouliot above, the appropriateness of our practices is understood against a backdrop of “background knowledge” (2011b, 8). In research, concrete options are usually called “methods” and the backdrop “methodology,” and your overall methodological approach guides your sense of what practical methods to use.

However, just as practices and background blend into each other over time (as practices work “in and on the world”), Aradau and Huysman argue against a strong distinction between methodology and methods. In fact, they think critical scholars should reject such a distinction as methods are “performative practices” that are “within worlds and partake in their shaping” and thus are “political rather than value neutral” (2014, 598, all quotes). In other words, one’s choice of methods both influence and is influenced by one’s methodological approach. Therefore, my choices (and challenges) are presented in context of the overall approach that mainly guided them: feminist, interpretive and qualitative.<sup>35</sup>

These traditions are not neatly bound, mutually exclusive, or necessarily compatible philosophically, which means the project is open to criticism of incoherence. However, I find much overlap in tools for systematic inquiry, although in different “languages,” and (perhaps more of concern) rationale. The subsection means to situate the study methodologically. Probably, those who feel at home with critical feminist and interpretivist approaches will support

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<sup>35</sup> I am not claiming that these are unitary or homogenous approaches but drawing on largely accepted elements of each (which may or may not overlap with the others).

my attempts to be reflexive but criticize my use of words such as “effective peacebuilding.”<sup>36</sup> It is also likely that those with a positivist take on qualitative case studies may approve of the step-by-step motivation of “case selection” (although neither they nor I will think this qualifies as a comparative case study) but balk at the idea that emotions may be relevant to effectiveness. However, I hope that either group may, like me, “learn more about their research question in the process of conducting their research” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 34) about peacebuilding partnership practices, receptive listening, and possibilities for change. The three subsections below describe how the study aims to deal with feminist power concerns, interpretive interviews, and qualitative case selection.

*A) Feminist power concerns for the research question, reflexivity, and results*

From critical feminist methodology (Ackerly et al. 2006), I have drawn suggestions for how to operationalize a concern for power inequalities<sup>37</sup> throughout the project: from the articulation of the research question, and the aim for researcher reflexivity throughout the process, to the identification of practical possibilities of change. Therefore, the research question is based on concerns by the marginalized groups (local actors) that previous research had already established while problematizing the actions of the relatively privileged (internationals).<sup>38</sup>

The design also built in feminist concerns for researcher reflexivity, as I started by investigating “my own” position as an INGO practitioner and along the way also included peace

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<sup>36</sup> As noted in a workshop with such scholars treating a draft chapter, June 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Ackerly and True call this the “second form” of feminist “normative inquiry” (2006, 252). While the first is to “draw on gendered experiences to reveal the normative gender bias inherent in the dominant conceptual frameworks” the second is to “use such experiences to revise core IR concepts” (252). In other words, to draw on feminist scholarship about power, while not explicitly asking about gender.

<sup>38</sup> This means listening to marginalized voices in a different way (through previous research) and instead “seeking out /.../ less visible sources and subjects” (Ackerly and True 2006, 252) in a way that flips the common feminist focus on asking questions to the marginalized groups to instead focus on the powerful (see for example Cohn 2011, 585). Studying Northern/Western actors also responds to calls from postcolonial scholars (in the North) that “that we in the North, instead of involving ourselves in other peoples’ everyday in the South, should be attending to our own everyday at home” (Darby 2011, 7).

researchers, “discovering” my new community was part of the same field (Chapter 4). Rather than a declaration of one’s background and inclinations, reflexivity is best thought of as what Ackerly and True (2006, 256) call “skeptical scrutiny.” This means asking self-critical questions about “all key elements of [your] research design,” such as your disciplinary assumptions and your inclusions/exclusions of sources, as research is a “terrain of power” (2006, 257, both quotes). These reflections can also be included with one’s findings.

Finally, the critical feminist call to “illuminate practical possibilities for transformation” (Ackerly and True 2006, 257) inspired the empirical focus on everyday practices. Rather than taking the detour via policymakers, I wanted to see if focusing on what my practitioner colleagues (in a broad sense) do on a daily basis would open up for how they (we) could do differently – even if there was no policy change. Feminist scholars suggest this approach expands the usefulness of the research and potentially empowers a wider range of actors (Wibben 2016, 9; Cohn 2011, 584). Choosing interviews within a professional community I was familiar with also facilitated access and quicker understanding of the practical common sense which was necessary as I did not have funding for extensive field work periods in new communities.<sup>39</sup>

*B) Interpretive interviews: meaning-making, mapping, and ...surprise!*

From interpretive methodology (Lynch 2014; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2014), I draw the focus on human meaning-making and the material

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<sup>39</sup> In response to Ackerly and True’s (2006, 255) third criteria for critical feminist research: choosing a deliberative moment, I would motivate the relevance of doing this research at this time beyond the (obviously relevant) time allowed by my PhD-program. In particular, I would point to “peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and statebuilding” in general going through a “fourth generation” which, according to Oliver Richmond is “still developing” and “may produce positive hybrid forms of peace, in which locally legitimacy and emancipatory goals combine with the liberal peace system” (2014, 90-91, all three quotes). In addition to this potential opening for change of practices, there is a burst of publications (by scholars and INGOs) and donor-INGO research projects on peacebuilding partnerships (see Helmüller 2018, Stephen 2018, and projects by aid agencies such as USAID and GTZ). (Of course, a feminist motivation could also be that little attention is given to a pressing area of concern.)

differences it makes, whether by the communities we study as researchers, or our own. In my project, this focus is particularly noticeable in relation to the interviews I carried out. To begin with, the purpose was to generate data on how the interviewees went about their days and what sense they made of that “way of doing things.” This led me to adopt a relational and conversational style of interviewing (Fuji 2018; Soss 2014), based on our relations as colleagues (broadly speaking) from my professional experience in the field. I hoped this would encourage interviewees to discuss and reflect broadly on different tasks and situations (more on the challenges below). It also meant I had to stay open to which theoretical resources beyond practice literature that I would use until I had identified general patterns in the data.

While I could have interviewed only practitioners from the INGO I am employed with, interpretive research design encourages mapping for “exposure” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 84-89). The purpose is not to find a representative sample in the sense of statistical studies. Instead, mapping for exposure aims to ensure that the data you use to interpret the “culture(s)” of a community is not particular to the characteristics of one organization, geographical location, or organizational position. By including three INGOs that were similar in key respects to partnerships<sup>40</sup> but speaking to people in different geographical, organizational, and experiential positions, what I heard as common sense of a community of practice was likely that, rather than a quirky feature of one oddball within it.

Finally, as emphasized by critical feminist research (and Bourdieu, as discussed above), interpretive methodology also helps the researcher deal with her embodiment in the project. One such method is to pay attention to surprises (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 33). Surprises are embodied reactions that alert you to something standing out as different from your expectations,

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<sup>40</sup> All three organizations were largely donor-funded and partner-funding, prioritizing peacebuilding in their mission, and adhering to the norms of local ownership and equal partnerships.

whether or not those expectations were explicitly articulated before or not. Therefore, this seemed a useful method to gain some more distance to my topic (as with the mapping) to balance my general familiarity with the field as a practitioner.

During my project, the main result of the surprise method was that I decided to investigate emotions. Neither my previous experience as a practitioner, nor my academic training (or my personal inclinations) had put any weight on emotions as a possible analytical aspect. Instead, it was the interpretive method of surprise that prompted me to ignore the emerging panic over the fact that nothing in my conversations with my interviewees was really unexpected to me. As I struggled to hold that discomfort, and wait, in between going over the material several times, I gradually realized that practitioners were expressing a lot of emotions even though we were only talking about what they did today, or any other “normal” day. While to me, this was uncomfortable (more under challenges, below), it led me to seek out new combinations of research and theory as discussed in the previous sections.

*C) Qualitative case selection: justifying inclusions and exclusions*

From qualitative case study methodology (Teorell and Svensson 2007), I draw a helpful method of clarifying what mapping for exposure can mean in practice, and justifying each choice with reference to theory, previous findings, or practical restrictions. As such, it helps to motivate the inclusions and exclusions that feminist method cautions us to be aware of. For my study, my research activities and motivations for them are summarized here.

First, the question asks about internationals. This is because the overall puzzle in international-local relations concerns listening while much research problematizes either how to strengthen voices of locals or other activities of internationals (such as organizing elections or reforming the security sector, etc.).



Second, I study INGO practitioners even though “internationals” are a much wider group, including UN peacekeepers, governmental agencies, etc. This is because INGOs are an increasingly important part of peacebuilding “interventions” broadly defined. In fact, “[s]ince the 1990s [they] have taken on more and more leadership responsibilities in peacebuilding efforts” (Lemay-Hébert and Toupin 2011, 10). In addition, Autessere (2014, 47) has shown that INGOs are part of the broader “community of practice” of peacebuilding internationals, and findings about their partnership practices may therefore be expected to resonate with the broader group.

Third, as discussed above, I chose these three INGOs as they are similar in terms of partnership approaches and forms, but different in terms of where they have headquarters and employ staff. Including organizations that developed their methodology in the Balkans and in East Africa respectively ensured that particular choices were at least not obviously area-dependent (considering, for example, different histories in relation to colonialism or particular Western countries). In addition, the selection was a practical delimitation, as two other organizations (based in the U.S. and the U.K.) never got back to me, despite repeated attempts to reach different people in different countries.

Fourth, the broad mapping for exposure described above partly aimed at maximizing my mix of familiar and strange. I have worked based in the Balkans for two years, and in one of the organizations for over five years, while I have only occasionally visited the East/ Central/ Horn of Africa briefly and encountered the other INGOs. Partly, the decision to include the Balkans and East Africa was to spot any differences in how meaning was made across different contexts, given the emphasis on context in peacebuilding (Autessere 2014; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013), and across organizational positions as research has found differences between “headquarter,” “field,” and “bush” offices (Veit and Schlichte 2012).

Fifth, I chose to rely mainly on interviews to prioritize the meaning-making of my research subjects. While the focus on practices suggests participant-observation or similar methods such as direct observation or shadowing (Czarniawska 2014), researchers in the practice turn often rely on interviews for access reasons or time limitations and still generate valuable insights (Pouliot 2016). In my case, I had limitations in the form of funding which did not allow long-term participatory field research. However, my interviews were complemented by a number (under ten) of informal discussions with practitioners (from INGOs, donors, and academia), a few opportunities for participant observation (at open events and within my employer organization), as well as my previous professional immersion as a practitioner. The latter helps me interpret the data from a practitioner's perspective and provides some concrete examples (noted in the text) (for a similar situation, see Hug 2016).

Sixth, the decision to include donors and peace researchers was initially a way of “zooming out” as a complement to “zooming in” on practices (Nicolini 2009; 2012). While zooming in starts us off “in the middle of the action” (2009, 123) zooming out brings our attention to its context, by investigating intermediaries, relations, and variations of practices (2009, 130). However, as the investigation moved forward and explanations developed, the purpose shifted to include donors and researchers as actors in the field (see Chapter 4).

In sum, I carried out sixty-three in-depth interviews over two years (most of them in the first year).<sup>41</sup> Of these, twenty-five were with INGO practitioners, twenty-three with donors, and fifteen with researchers (only a few interviews were with more than one person, and only seven were follow-ups<sup>42</sup>). Most were done face to face in Stockholm, Uppsala, Nairobi, Belgrade,

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<sup>41</sup> Sample interview questions included the following: “Can you walk me through a common day, what do you do at work?” “How is partnership relevant to these ordinary tasks you have described, or isn’t it?” “Can you tell me more about an occasion where you felt you /your organization were doing the right thing as good partners?”

<sup>42</sup> Of the interviews, four with INGOs, two with donors, and one with a researcher were follow-ups.

Pristina, London, and Washington D.C., but several were done remotely, with people working in these places or in the DR Congo, Ethiopia, and Somalia.<sup>43</sup> All but one interview took over thirty minutes, most around one hour, and a few up to two hours.

*D) Challenges in studying emotions and listening*

Three methodological challenges in studying emotions and listening among INGO practitioners involved handling my own emotions at the idea, interpreting emotions in relation to listening practices, and balancing familiarity with distance. The first of these, was handling my intense discomfort at even the idea of studying emotions. Explicitly analyzing emotions was by far the biggest unforeseen decision during the process. It was driven by my commitment to take seriously both the interview data and the intention to follow surprises, in other words to practice<sup>44</sup> receptive listening with the attempt to “understand differently” than I had as a practitioner. While it made me uncomfortable to pay attention to emotions expressed by interviewees (as does this admission), so did erasing them from my account as they seemed to indicate something important about the topic.<sup>45</sup> In pursuing this “something,” I clung to feminist insights that “unease” can be a research methodology (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2016), that such “outlaw emotions can help in developing alternatives to prevailing conceptions of reality /.../ by motivating new investigations” (Jaggar 1989, 167), that emotions themselves are not private but enabled and shaped by our social reality (Ahmed 2014), and that “[b]eing reflexive is uncomfortable – or it should be” (Enloe 2016, 259). Paying attention to emotions, those of

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<sup>43</sup> Originally, I had planned to interview people working in the DRC as my African case, in person. However, just as my travel plans were getting more concrete (fall 2016) DRC’s president Kabila postponed the scheduled election, which made the security situation more uncertain. Given my limited experience of travelling in the DRC and the lack of formal institutional support (evacuation routines, etc.) I decided not to go. As this limited my access to interviewees in the DRC, I also included interviewees working in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia who were interviewed in person or remotely.

<sup>44</sup> Here, I use practice as “attempt” to perform, drawing attention to the very real possibility of failing.

<sup>45</sup> Other IR researchers also report feeling compelled to erase emotions, including their own, from their findings as it does not seem appropriate to include them (Gregory and Åhäll 2015, 8)

research participants as well as my own as the researcher, has thus not only provided a new analysis of the listening puzzle in peacebuilding; it has also highlighted the intertwined nature of substantive inquiry with research design.

The second challenge, when I started considering including emotions in my analysis, was how to identify and interpret them. The practice-based approach helped me to treat emotions like other practices, and to use practitioners' *accounts* of their feelings as data. In other words, I am not trying to get into their heads or bodies to evaluate how they "really" feel, or to fit these experiences to psychological definitions. Neither am I evaluating whether practitioners themselves name emotions the "right" way (when they do name them). Instead, in keeping with practice-based perspectives of understanding practitioners' experiences on their own terms, I am either using their own labeling or striving to name the experiences in a way that practitioners would recognize and (mostly) agree with. This is because my purpose is to understand what their emotions can tell us about the conditions in the peacebuilding field for listening to locals rather than examining what they feel as relevant in itself.

The third challenge was balancing familiarity and distance to still be able to "understand differently" regarding a field where I take many things for granted after almost ten years of work. Organizational ethnographers, such as Ybema and Kamsteeg call this balancing between "making familiar" and "making strange." While classic ethnographers emphasized long periods of "immersion" in cultures unknown to them in order to "make familiar," researchers in my situation are more likely to "get caught up in 'everydayness', organizational life may become normal /.../ and thus unworthy of observation – as water to a fish" (2009, 103, see also Alvesson 2009, on "at home ethnography").

To develop a “dual stance” where the researcher can still note particularities of the culture, Ybema and Kamsteeg suggest different strategies, such as “surprise, paradox, play, and irony” (2009, 103), echoing the interpretive approach described above. Aligned with interpretive and feminist acknowledgement of the researcher as an embodied human, they further emphasize the emotional consequences that may result, and how to use these productively as analytical tools. Discomfort is to be expected and they even “believe that confusion, estrangement, loneliness, wonder, annoyance, and any other distancing emotion experienced during fieldwork, while hardly joyful, can be vital sources of inspiration for a researcher,” helping to keep her “on the alert” (2009, 106).

These reflections on emotions bring us back to the introduction of this section on research design and the feminist methodology of “unease.” The feminist concern with power in the process has also led to much attention to the discussion about familiarity and distance, insider-outsider role, and relationships between researcher and researched (Ackerly et al. 2006; Cohn 1987, 2011; Enloe 2016). Struggling with how to interview, observe, and analyze potential and actual colleagues, I draw on Holvikivi’s discussion about the “situational and contingent” (2016, 1) character of the boundary between academics and practitioners. Particularly, I use her concept of “critical friends” as a helpful model.

Aiming to be a *critical* friend to the practitioners she is studying, according to Holvikivi (2016) means resisting cooptation into practitioner agendas. That could mean resisting the temptation to produce practical recommendations that can be easily incorporated into practitioners’ “business as usual,” if the whole idea of “effective peacebuilding” (in my case) is problematic from a critical perspective. However, being a critical *friend* also means trying to understand the field from practitioners’ point of view and considering the methodological and

political challenges that your movements across the porous boundary between the inside and outside may involve.

As examples of those challenges, Holvikivi points out that efforts to equalize power differences with some people you research, such as by giving back in time and substance by holding a workshop, may simultaneously increase inequality between you and others (2016, 6). In my case, perhaps taking notes during a manager discussion on partnership (one participant observation opportunity) put me on more equal footing with that group, but perhaps it also made interviewees who were not managers cautious as to the possibility of speaking frankly in their conversations with me. In addition, Holvikivi notes, that while access may be greatly facilitated, the critique you develop may undermine the work of the practitioners who gave you that access (2016, 6). In other words, while I aimed for mutually rewarding conversations, some of my interviewees may at best think talking to me was a waste of time, and at worst, contributing to research that would counteract their work. Then again, the question itself is about changing peacebuilding, so if it is at all successful, it should lead to understandings of how business as usual can be counteracted, at least in some respects. While there is no one final or correct interpretation, these concerns underline the political character of all research.

Having thus laid out the substantive and methodological aspects of the listening puzzle in peacebuilding and how this dissertation project tackled them, the next section outlines how each chapter reports and analyzes the findings of the research.

### **3. Dissertation outline**

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 analyzes *tensions, exhaustion and anxiety* expressed by practitioners, in two steps. First, a practice-based analysis shows what INGOs have to do to demonstrate competence in the peacebuilding game that they play through their everyday

practices. The analysis reveals contradictions and taboos they must navigate daily, which places concrete obstacles in the way of listening to unexpected input demanding reorganization or putting their funding or partner relations at risk.

Second, adding feminist insights (Ahmed 2014) on the way *emotions can alert us to existing norms and power relations* adds to our understanding of the stakes involved as well as the structure of the peacebuilding field. While stakes such as funding and partnerships are fundamental for what INGOs do, the identified taboos reveal how their identity oscillates between being donors and being partners. However, a closer look at the history of practitioners' emotions shows that these (and other) practices are "sticky with colonialism." Building on this insight, we can see INGOs as not only torn between (being) donors and partners, but also as struggling to be included as players in two different peacebuilding games. The two games have contradictory rules for competence. While one is an old game of hierarchical power relations, the other is an emerging and partly imagined game of more equal relations. This conceptualization of INGOs' position clarifies why it can be difficult for them to listen receptively for new solutions in the midst of these negative experiences of emotions and structural contradictions. The first main argument of the dissertation is thus that emotions do matter for listening in peacebuilding partnerships.

In Chapter 3, I turn to practitioners' positive experiences of emotions in their everyday to explore what they can tell us about conditions for receptive listening: do positive emotions show partnerships heading in a different direction than their colonial past? Working with three types of positive emotions, I show that they are related to things practitioners want to do and think they should. I analyze stories of *pride* in facilitating between different types of locals, of "yes!-*moments of achievement*" in relation to translating between local partners and international

policymakers, and of *responsibility* in linking local partners to international donors. In the first, practice-based step of the analysis, I show that the examples reveal that INGOs actually do listen to their local partners, drawing precisely on their in-between position (that proved so troublesome in Chapter 2) as a resource. Ending here could thus have left us with a surprising answer to the overall question: “Why are internationals so bad at listening? – They’re not!” However, by adding more feminist insights (Ahmed 2006) on how emotions indicate subjects’ orientation, the second step moves the analysis further.

In fact, the second step shows that while INGOs are found to be surprisingly oriented towards local partners, how they are so actually reinforces partners’ (and their own) skills in the old colonial game rather than contributes to a new, more equal game. In addition, this one-directional attention actually works to hide INGOs themselves, making them invisible as political actors. This latter insight aligns with feminist research and activism, where the invisibility of the norm (as patriarchy) and the normative actors (as men) is found to be a major problem for equal conversations across power differences. The second main argument of the dissertation is therefore that emotions matter *because* many practices are still sticky with a colonial hierarchy where internationals have the privilege of being “invisible” as political actors, and losing this privilege involves emotional consequences which they resist.

In Chapter 4 I develop the finding about invisibility into the third main argument of the dissertation: internationals must “choose to lose” their privilege and prepare to deal with the vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty involved if they are to contribute to change and learn to listen receptively. The analysis frames this privilege as an “invisibility cloak” which keeps internationals and their weaknesses hidden from the partnership, or “off the table,” while local partners are constantly scrutinized. By revisiting the interview data, I show that this invisibility



cloak is thickly layered, hiding INGO practitioners personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. Zooming out to investigate the reach of the invisibility cloak, I demonstrate that it also covers donors and peace researchers, suggesting that invisibility is a general condition for the international Subject. Building on these insights to examine possibilities for change, the two-step analysis then flips the famous question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” to ask “Can the Subject (Learn to) Listen?”

While the first, practice-based step of the analysis finds openings for change in “reflexivity,” the short answer to the question becomes “no, probably not” as these openings are stopped short by the emphasis on practices as performances that are *competent*. Therefore, the second step adds further feminist and queer knowledge (Ahmed 2017; Wilcox 2017) of how doing (and being) different from the norm means *failing* the existing standards for competence. Integrating these insights gained from marginalized positions, and flipping them to become more useful for analyzing privileged actors, suddenly opens for a different, if still conditional, answer of “yes, if...”

In short, the feminist analysis demonstrates that yes, internationals can learn to listen, if they choose to lose current privileges and break shared orientations by becoming what Ahmed terms “killjoys” in their existing peacebuilding communities. Doing so has emotional consequences. More specifically, internationals must recognize that working for change is inevitably a political stand. Therefore, they must prepare to handle the emotions of vulnerability, discomfort/pain, and uncertainty that inevitably (if not uniformly) will follow.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I further develop how the findings of the dissertation contribute to existing knowledge. Practically, I point to some concrete examples where practitioners I interviewed had paid attention to and/or handled emotional consequences of change and taken

risks to make themselves vulnerable (as persons or collectives). In addition, I show how relevant skills and strategies for developing “killjoy support” practices can be derived from other literature. Methodologically, I draw out lessons from my study that suggest how to go about studying practices in general and emotions in particular, as well as what practicing research reflexivity can mean in a critical practice-based study. Empirically, I offer the dissertation as a case study using emotions as data for practice-based research and indicate how it can also add to discussion of emotions in IR, sociology, and anthropology. In addition, the flipped perspective to investigate people in privileged positions may even contribute to Ahmed’s and other feminists’ work on marginalized groups. Finally, theoretically, the dissertation contributes to alleviate the criticized lack of attention to change in practice-based research. It does so by integrating feminist (and other critical traditions’) work on power and marginalization, and it demonstrates how these theoretical perspectives can concretely address weaknesses in practice-based work. In addition, the dissertation may suggest to critical work how to revive the ambition of articulating practical possibilities for change, by learning from practice-based research’s more incremental approach and working with creatively with interdisciplinary resources. Each section also points to limitations and possible future questions, for peacebuilding practitioners and researchers alike.

## CHAPTER 2: EMOTIONS MATTER

### Tense, stressed, and anxious internationals playing contradictory games

“We might say ‘[Our INGO] and partners have influenced something’...but how did that happen? Did *we* do it, but it sounds better that they were with us, or...did we go to Brussels *together*? Or are we just [joining *them*] to give ourselves credit?”

*INGO interviewee*

This quote illustrates how anxious INGO practitioners often are in relation to their local peacebuilding partners. On the one hand, INGOs are eager for partnership where they do things “together.” On the other hand, they are aware that power inequalities can influence how partners talk (or not) with them and so, they cannot be sure of their interpretations of the situation. Perhaps partners would feel too dependent to protest if the INGO would include them in their own advocacy actions or if the INGO would simply steal some of the partners’ thunder? Meanwhile, the dominant discourse of equal partnerships (described in Chapter 1) provides incentives for all involved to keep up an image of open communication which creates what I call “power taboos” that INGOs must not disrupt, leaving them anxiously wondering. In this chapter, I analyze such anxieties along with tensions and stress INGO practitioners experience in relation to their everyday practices. I analyze these emotions in search for clues on the listening puzzle described in Chapter 1.

As described in Chapter 1, there is a puzzling gap between the normative consensus that internationals should listen to their local partners and their partners’ contrasting experience that INGOs do not care for their opinions. This gap motivates my overall research question: why are internationals so bad at listening, even though they want to and know they should? The consensus at normative level indicates that there may be more answers to be found in the

mundane practices that make up international peacebuilding on a day-to-day basis. After all, this is where local actors generally encounter international partners.

Therefore, my conversations with practitioners from peacebuilding INGOs (along with a few occasions of observation), focus on what they do on a daily basis. Like many practice-based researchers, I started by asking peacebuilding practitioners to describe how they go about their day. This way, I aimed to get at commonsense “dos and don’ts” in their field: is there something about *how* they do peacebuilding on a daily basis that puts obstacles in the way of receptive listening to their partners, and if so, what enables INGOs to overcome those obstacles in moments they think of as good partnership? Experienced practitioners in any field develop a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990, 66-68), a practical knowledge, a sense of “things to do or not do” (1990, 53) to be taken seriously and considered a competent “player” by other actors (1990, 140). Being considered incompetent by, for example, partners and donors involves serious risks to INGOs who are dependent on good partnerships and donor funding to be able to exist and carry out their work.

Of course, these dos and don’ts, or “rules” of the game can change over time and what is considered incompetent at one point can be reevaluated as an early demonstration of competence under the new rules. Today, treating emotions as beside the “real” point may be considered competent peacebuilding, which is probably why my participants (and I, as a fellow-practitioner) did exactly this in our interactions – at first. However, gradually I realized that bubbling up in side comments, coffee talk, and body language, in long sighs, wry smiles, and clenched teeth, winks, laughter, and excited exclamations, seemed to be another story about the feel for the game, that is, about their *feelings* for the game. Therefore, I started asking myself what would happen if I would treat those emotions as part of the game and the requirement to hide them as a

taken-for-granted rule that exists today. Unlike most practice-based researchers who only pay attention to what practitioners do (or not) during their work days, I also examine how they feel about it. What can such an inquiry reveal, help us understand about the peacebuilding game, or, as it turns out, the *two games* that I argue INGOs navigate simultaneously, one of today and one (partly imagined) of tomorrow?

In this chapter, I present data on negative experiences of emotions by peacebuilding practitioners, as pertaining to *things they must do* as well as to *things they must not do* to demonstrate their competence to other actors in the field, particularly donors and partners. I started with the negative emotions because it seemed reasonable that they would indicate obstacles to listening, something these practitioners want to do. The anxious back-and-forth quoted above showed that there was something hindering an open communication, for the practitioner in question. As I went back to my notes and recordings from the interviews, I realized that negative emotions indicated patterns of what practitioners perceive as “things to do or not to do.”

My first-step, practice-based, analysis<sup>46</sup> identified things INGOs must do as including the tense and exhausting juggling of contradictions. I include two such examples, around capacity and authenticity. Things they must not do include disrupting what I call power taboos in their relations with partners (and donors), leading to an anxiety of the unsaid where they avoid some topics or treat them very carefully, as the quote above shows. Feeling tense, exhausted, or anxious, are clearly not conducive for anyone’s ability to listen receptively. The analysis of these emotions and practices can thus help us understand concrete obstacles to receptive listening in

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<sup>46</sup> The presentation of data in the first sections of each empirical chapter can be thought of as a part of the practice-based analysis, which is clarified and deepened in each chapter’s “first step analysis” (which is then followed by a feminist “second step analysis.”)

practitioners' everyday. However, that emotions can serve as an analytical entrypoint to clusters of practices is just the first step of the analysis in this chapter.

The second step is to add feminist scholarship which deepens the analysis. While Bourdieu, one of the “canonic” theorists on practices (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, “Introduction”; Wilcox 2017, 3), repeatedly emphasizes the importance of emotions for practical knowledge, there are few examples of practice-based research on how to study them. Therefore, I draw particularly on Sara Ahmed’s work on *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014) to discuss these emotions further, which contributes three additional, structural, insights. First, it contributes insights on how INGO practitioners perceive norms and structural power as well as how they experience their own position in those structures. Second, it helps reveal historical structures (or as Bourdieu might say, performs anamnesis), demonstrating that these peacebuilding practices are still “sticky with colonialism.” And third, the colonial remnants indicate that practitioners are navigating not one game of peacebuilding, but two games, a present and a future one. In the old, existing game, power relations are organized hierarchically, whereas in the future (and partly imagined) game, they are equal. Demonstrating competence in these two incommensurable games puts INGOs in impossible positions that impede receptive listening in practice.

The chapter thus suggests that emotions matter, and that acknowledging and learning to mediate these emotions competently is part of a possible new game. In such a new game, INGOs can listen receptively to their local partners and thus participate more fully in the joint, political project of peacebuilding.

## 1. Things INGOs *must do*: juggling contradictions

### A) *The tension of walking a tightrope: the capacity contradiction*

The first type of contradiction that INGOs must juggle daily I call the *capacity contradiction*. With this I mean that, on the one hand, INGOs must constantly praise their local partners' capacity to effect change in their communities.<sup>47</sup> Doing so shows donors that INGOs are worthy of support as they can both find and successfully partner with the right local actors. On the other hand, INGOs must constantly work to convince donors that they provide their local partners with “added value,” as donors otherwise may choose another INGO or fund the local partner directly. This balance means INGOs are walking a tightrope.

Slipping off the tightrope could mean INGOs lose one of two (or both) crucial resources: their partnerships with local peacebuilders, which provide them with the why and how of doing peacebuilding; or their relationships<sup>48</sup> with donors, which provide them with the funds they need to work and exist. The high stakes involved became clear to me as I first thought interviewees were glaringly contradicting themselves. That is, they seemed to say completely opposite things using the same word, both that their partners have capacity and that they themselves build partners' capacity. I thought, “why would you need to build it if they already have it?” However, listening more closely I realized that both sides of the argument were articulated along a very narrow path.

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<sup>47</sup> To provide some context, the local partners of the INGOs in this study carry out many different types of projects that aim, more or less directly, to effect peaceful change. For example, partners can be directly involved in organizing peace talks between warring parties (including governments or groups of citizens associated with them), mobilizing constituencies for peace or for particular demands on peace talks, accompanying/ integrating/ protecting threatened populations, or working against hate-speech or recruitments for armed groups in “their own” communities. They can also work with activities aiming for peaceful developments and relations in a more indirect, long-term way, such as providing employment training (English, computers, hair dressing, entrepreneurship) or training on civic skills and rights (how to vote or stand for office, human rights) as well as carry out advocacy activities (for more inclusionary or less corrupt politics), etc.

<sup>48</sup> These are often also called partnerships in the world of practitioners, but I avoid doing so here to decrease confusion.

In fact, there was almost a standard phrasing that seemed tailor-made to narrowly avoid the contradiction. Rather than my interviewees explicitly saying that they felt tense, my indicator of the tightrope is almost the opposite: the lack of explicit recognition that there is a contradiction here. Instead, the way the different capacities of locals and INGOs are discussed makes them “tend to appear as necessary, even natural” (Bourdieu 1990, 53) to those inside the game, while seeming constructed and contrived to me as the (even temporary) outsider. I argue that such narrowly constructed categories make it harder for INGOs to listen for anything outside the box. Only when the taken-for-granted is questioned does the tension show, between praising partners’ capacity and claiming that it needs building.

Almost all my INGO interviewees praised their local partners’ capacity to bring about change in their communities. This was expressed through quotes about partners having “Lots!” of capacity, or “they have the access, the networks,” “they know their villages,” and “they have the passion /.../ and the will to change.” Praising the capacity of their partners shows that INGOs are competent players in the peacebuilding field in at least two ways. First, it demonstrates that INGOs embrace the strong norm of equal partnership described earlier, valuing local expertise. Second, by highlighting the capacity of their partners, INGOs show that they themselves know how to identify, choose, and maintain relations with “good” locals.<sup>49</sup> The latter is a vital skill as it is well-known in the field that the often inaccessible and violent contexts make it difficult to know which local actors are capable rather than just well-meaning, or even fraudulent. In other words, as one interviewee said, “there is a limited number of [showing scare quotes in the air] good partners.” Convincing donors your INGO can successfully partner with these “good

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<sup>49</sup> See Kappler (2012) for a further discussion on internationals’ constructions of “good” and “bad” locals.



partners” is necessary, as donors are less and less enthusiastic about funding international NGOs, preferring to fund local ones directly as confirmed by several donor interviews.

However, because of this increasing skepticism of donors towards INGOs as “middle men,” INGOs also have to convince donors that they provide “added value” to the local partners. Despite the emphasis on capable partners as described above, the added value that INGOs contribute is almost always articulated as essential capacity building. Unlike locals, INGOs have, as one participant said, “the methods /.../ the capacity, the *how* to change /.../ at a structural level.” One participant, whom I quote at length, sums up the common view of complementing capacities quite nicely:

“what I think needs to happen is to develop partnerships that are *equal*. Not maybe financially equal, but equal in terms of ideas and complementing each other’s capacities. So, what local partners will have is, ahm, knowledge, knowledge about the context, ahm, they will have local capacities to do something, they will know *what* is needed. And what externals can have is something, something, something different ...a different perspective, more financial capacities, maybe more skills, something, but they will not know what to do with those. [Inaudible] so they will fit very nicely [together], not imposing to local partners what we think from outside is going to work for them. Because then it means it will not work, they will not feel the ownership, and the whole thing will just collapse /.../ for me, that’s just a waste of money and waste of everybody’s time.”

To argue for their added value compared to commercial course providers entering the peacebuilding (and development) field in the last decade, INGOs tend to talk less about the content of capacity building and more about how it is done. They emphasize that capacity building is part of a long-term, trusting relationship where partners are comfortable in admitting real weaknesses. The INGOs themselves are uniquely placed (close to, but still outside) to sensitively suggest tailor-made remedies. Such remedies can involve in-house consultant processes where partners get “real-time” coaching in recruitment or reporting processes, or network meetings where several partners are brought together to improve certain skills. The

tailor-made aspect creates added value and motivates substantial presence in the country, or as one participant emphatically exclaimed, “I do *not understand* those working with partners at a distance /.../ how can you *know* /.../ it’s so much about the *daily contact*”.

In my interpretation, the capacity contradiction makes practitioners feel tense, as if they are walking a tightrope between claiming that partners already have yet still need essential peacebuilding capacity. INGOs handle this contradiction by careful wording and standard answers that they can hold on to in discussions. Moving along such a narrow path of possibilities is not conducive to receptive listening for what “we” could learn from “them.” That mutual learning is mostly (though not exclusively) an idea is indicated by the many surprised and incoherent answers I got to the question “what can/do/have *you* learn(ed) from your partners?” For example, after listing “understanding of the context,” “a correct analysis,” and “a network of activists,” one participant fell silent and then exclaimed “Wow! That was almost hard to answer, because you just take it as a given!” Another of my transcripts shows the note “[thinks, long silence]” after this question. My argument is not that INGOs *think* that they are superior, but that it is *unthought* and taken for granted that learning in partnerships only goes from international to local. (Exceptions to this unspoken rule were also presented as exceptional by participants.) Admitting the wrong weaknesses could lead to falling off the tightrope, losing donor funding. The tense balancing to demonstrate competence thus decreases possibilities to listen for actual needs and capacities expressed by local partners.

#### *B) Exhaustion: the authenticity contradiction*

The second type of contradictions that INGOs must juggle, I call the *authenticity contradiction*. On the one hand, INGOs must demonstrate that they are authentic representatives of or links to the “grassroots” in conflict-affected countries and that they are completely based on what these grassroots think and do. On the other hand, INGOs must be authentically

professional, which in today's peacebuilding and development fields has come to mean competent in management and bureaucratic procedures. While the tension in the capacity contradiction snuck up on me through my confusion over practitioners' seemingly inconsistent use of the word "capacity," the exhaustion that I connect to the authenticity contradiction was blatantly obvious in - and even before - many of our encounters.

Practitioners are constantly talking about how much they have to do, how stressed they are, and how tight their schedules are. Many of my interviews were rescheduled, pushed forward, or cut shorter, and interviewees often came straight from another meeting, running or walking to our meeting point (whether at their office or an outside location), or, for skype interviews getting set up at the last minute. In addition, they often apologized profusely for being late or just in time, for not reading the explanation of my research in depth or preparing answers in advance.<sup>50</sup> In the interviews, people generally spoke fast (at least to begin with) and explicitly talked about themselves and/or colleagues being "overwhelmed," "swamped," and "on the brink" (or over it). If practitioners are tired they will be much less able to listen to learn new things. Therefore, in this section, I aim to show that practitioners' ability to listen receptively to local partners is likely impeded by the contradicting demands that INGOs must be competent grassroots representatives as well as competent professional bureaucrats.

On the one hand, to be competent as peacebuilding actors, INGOs are supposed to be authentically grassroots. With this I mean that they are expected by themselves, partners, and donors, to be genuinely connected to "ordinary people" in the conflict-affected area they are working in. While governmental and inter-governmental actors (including donors) fulfill their normative commitment to local ownership by partnering with larger local institutions or

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<sup>50</sup> These could of course also be signs that the interview is not seen as vital to their work, but combined with the other indicators of stress, I think this behavior mainly confirms the stress interpretation.

organizations, INGOs do so by representing and linking to the “people” affected. The INGOs in my study do not usually carry out projects for or with the general population themselves. Instead, they express their commitment to local ownership by partnering with and listening to local civil society actors (supposedly) made up by the people affected by war and conflict. Doing so thus demonstrates to themselves, partners, donors, and other actors, that they are competent peacebuilding actors, aware of and adhering to the normative consensus of local ownership established in Chapter 1.

In addition, being grassroots has a longer history and a deeper meaning to these and many other INGOs. In development, there is a strong tradition of “people to people” aid. In peacebuilding, civil society activity virtually exploded in the 1990s along with the hope that the sector would bring forth peace and democracy through a focus on human (rather than state) security. Many INGOs’ founding identities are based on an idea of civil society having a special role in mobilizing people, speaking truth to power, and holding decision-makers accountable.

In my interviews, INGOs express this grassroots identity by indicating their close relationship with their local partners, and that they, as quoted in Chapter 1, “base everything we do on what [partners] say.” Donor interviews confirm that they expect INGOs to have this role, by saying things like “all our [INGO] partners have their base [local partners] out in the rural areas.” Donors also expect credible INGO advocacy work to build on what one donor interviewee called, “programs where they ...sort of can... extract [scoops her hand and shows a digging movement],” indicating that INGOs should get to the root of issues, through their grassroots connections.

On the other hand, to be considered a competent peacebuilding actor, worthy of handling millions of dollars of donor funding, it is simply not enough for INGOs to be authentically

connected to the “grassroots.” They must also produce a staggering array of bureaucratic documents to demonstrate organizational professionalism. Much has been written about the professionalization of peacebuilding (and aid) and its negative effects during the last fifteen years. Core features include the explosion of project management models and the development of “audit cultures” (Strathern 1996/97, 2000; see also Bernal and Grewal 2014; Engle Merry 2016; Eyben 2005, and much of the critique against liberal peacebuilding). However, despite documented negative effects, little evidence of positive effects, and sector-wide initiatives of “Doing Development Differently,”<sup>51</sup> bureaucratic demands just seem to increase (although a few people thought they saw signs of change).

To convey part of what it takes to be authentically professional and some of the feelings it generates, I quote one participant at length:

“I think [donors] generally are getting more and more demanding. They want more of everything. /.../ they want our resource mobilization strategy, our formats for organizational assessment /.../ they want a detailed activity plan four years ahead /.../, all the documents, everything has to be documented [but] they don’t want to pay anything for the coordination and administration”. But not only do donors want more documents, they also want these done their way [despite common commitments to support civil society on its own term]. /.../ “[I]t’s also about the reporting, some are /.../ picking our indicators [of progress] apart, ‘we don’t like this indicator, change it’, they shouldn’t be so nitty gritty /.../ and then they all have their own online systems too /.../ where our partners also have to fill in the forms and upload the right documents [looks up, smiles a little, sighs] it’s micro-management. It’s ok that they want to know, but maybe they’re asking about the wrong things.”

If INGOs handle the capacity contradiction by carefully treading a tightrope, they handle the authenticity contradiction much more brutally and head-on: by doing everything at the same time. Everything that is, to demonstrate that they are both authentically grassroots and

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<sup>51</sup> <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/> (last accessed February 14, 2017) is an initiative by individuals from different kinds of practitioner organizations, including institutional donors.

authentically professional. INGOs must thus be competent to mobilize “the people” to deliver “empowerment” and other civil society tasks, *and* to develop accounting systems that can handle millions of dollars and report on quantitative indicators of grassroots peacebuilding that show evidence of overall “impact.” The resulting exhaustion is felt across organizations, locations, and positions. Three examples from my field notes:

- An office manager in [active conflict zone], managing a team of six people gets 150 e-mails per day, and reads me some from today: a security situation because of a closed border, need to authorize payments to partners by checking and then uploading their report to the donor’s particular system, giving input on a partner’s internal recruitment processes to build human resources capacity, radio interviews, advocacy events at the embassy... S/he says “No! No!” to talking again until I say the magic words “next year.” Mid-November, it’s already “crazy before Christmas.”
- A regional manager in [Western Europe] feels “overwhelmed” and “burdened” in front of his/her e-mail and can hardly do what s/he “wants to do” because of what s/he “must do”: send that report, answer that donor.
- Another regional manager in [Western Europe] sees his/her main role as lifting the “pain, very real pain” of prioritizing among life-and-death issues from his/her staff. His/her colleague – as well as his/her boss – both often have to shoulder operational tasks to shield staff on (or over) the brink to burn-out.

Concretely, INGOs prioritize both time with partners and fulfilling donor demands. The widespread exhaustion that follows is not conducive to receptive listening. Being tired is simply one of the worst states for being open, and time spent developing a “resource mobilization policy” cannot be spent in meetings or activities with partners. Detailed formats also make it difficult for INGOs to listen for unexpected information, such as results that do not fit the pre-defined boxes. Suspicions that donors do not have time or care to read all the documents they require fuel “bad stress” by making tasks seem meaningless.<sup>52</sup> The time INGOs have to meet

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<sup>52</sup> [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/topics/stressatwp/en/](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/topics/stressatwp/en/) (last accessed February 15, 2017).

partners' needs for training is further squeezed as more capacity building has to be targeted to teaching partners how to "fill in the forms and upload the right documents."

Finally, in an ironic catch 22 that reminds us of the stakes involved, professionalization of INGOs can make donors turn directly to local NGOs as more authentically grassroots. As one donor representative expressed it "for sure [INGOs] do amazing proposals [but] when you go to the ground, most of the time they don't even have access." However, s/he admitted that "anything that has to do with funds, the international NGOs come in very handy /.../ they are all very well trained." This not only underlines the risks INGOs run while navigating the authenticity paradox, but also pits local and international NGOs against each other in a competitive relationship, which we will see below also affects receptivity negatively.

In sum, this subsection has analyzed what I have called the capacity and authenticity contradictions that INGOs must handle in demonstrating they are competent actors in peacebuilding. I argue that the negative emotions that arise from juggling these contradictions impede INGOs' capacity to listen receptively to their local partners and take what they say into account. Taking the tension of walking a tightrope seriously reveals that INGOs must stick to a narrow discourse on capacity building that leaves little space for them to articulate what they could learn from local partners. Paying attention to the exhaustion that many peacebuilding internationals experience shows that it partly results from prioritizing *both* being authentically grassroots, investing time and trust in partnerships, *and* authentically professional, delivering topnotch bureaucratic documents. On an everyday level then, INGOs are simply too busy and circumscribed to be able to listen receptively to anything partners say that would need them to "understand differently." While this section has examined obstacles posed by what they must do:

juggle contradictions, in the next section I look at how their listening is hindered by what they must not do: disrupt power taboos.

## **2. Things INGOs must not do: disrupting power taboos**

One could easily get the impression that there are not really any taboos around power, given how readily INGO practitioners brought up, even joked about, who has the money in both types of relations (with partners and with donors). After all, I only had to mention I was studying the “relationship with partners, connected to money” as I was passing a senior manager in the corridor of an INGO, to hear him/her laugh and yell as s/he was rushing off “without the money they’re *gone!*” Just as quickly another manager (another day) blurted out that s/he would also “say those nice things” about partnership, but “when that report is due...” slapping the back of one hand in the other palm while raising eyebrows expectantly, to indicate expected delivery. In almost every single interview there was a point when money was mentioned, usually as a variety of “when it all comes down to it, *we* have the money,” (or even the Swedish version “well, *we’re* the ones *sitting* on the money” indicating that INGOs really have to be *moved* to part with it). It is often said with a tone of regret, admitting this as a decidedly non-equal but inevitable characteristic of their partnerships that other practices must work around or mitigate.

However, the in-depth interviews revealed that at another level, the power effects of money is a topic infused with tension, which shapes what can be talked about and what cannot. Or, as a former colleague said, raising eyebrows and smiling wryly as I described my research interests: “oh I see, the *awkward* questions.” Through my empirical research, I found that power does not only create jokes yelled out openly, but also an anxiety of the unsaid. There are things that cannot be talked about; they are treated as taboos that must be handled as if they do not exist



or are unproblematic, in order to uphold the appearance of equality that is demanded by the present peacebuilding discourse.

Here, I give two examples of taboos in relation to partners but there are others, including in relation to donors. Disrupting power taboos would cause risks to INGOs' existence as competent players in peacebuilding, while skillfully avoiding them can protect INGOs' identity and crucial resources. Therefore, INGOs are not likely to be receptive to hear things that they sense may cause such a disruption.

A) *Anxiety of the unsaid 1: "How will I Know?" what our partners really think*

The power taboo between INGOs and their local partners that I will articulate here can be labeled "How will I know?" (after the Whitney Houston song<sup>53</sup>), as it forces INGOs to live with the anxiety of not knowing what partners "really" think about certain things. An open discussion may simply be too disruptive to their identity as a competent peacebuilding player and is therefore avoided, causing INGOs to not be able to hear local partners' views on vital topics. The "How will I know?" taboo first appeared to me in a particular interview.

After an hour or so of conversation about how the INGO and their local partners had developed a deep mutual understanding through several years of cooperation (which included working through some misunderstandings), one participant paused. Then s/he said "it would be good if you could talk to our partners, to find out what they think about us." At first, I was taken aback, as I had already said that my project did not include interviews with local partners. When I asked why, s/he explained that the partners were always "so positive," even in discussions with the donors, and that this was "not realistic." I continued to probe, "why don't you think they are

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<sup>53</sup> For those unfamiliar with Houston's work, the lyrics continue "How will I know if he really loves me?" and go on to list different ways the subject could find out without asking directly, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/whitneyhouston/howwilliknow.html> (last accessed February 15, 2017).

telling you what they think,” expecting a return to the earlier discussion of money/power.

However, s/he was quiet, and then said that perhaps it was an expression of respect. I was taken by this conversation, because of the participant’s deep concern with what partners thought, and the complete disconnect with the money/power issue I first saw as the obvious cause.

As I went on with interviews and went back to previous material, I found other examples of the taboo “How will I know?” For example, one participant, cited at the beginning of this chapter, reasoned back and forth regarding how their INGO could take credit or not for doing things together with partners: “We might say ‘[Our INGO] and partners have influenced something’...but how did that happen? Did *we* do it, but it sounds better that they were with us, or...did we go to Brussels *together*? Or are we just [joining *them*] to give ourselves credit?” I wanted to say: “Ask them!” but when I imagined myself in that situation (as a fellow practitioner) I immediately felt resistance, how impossible it would be. I simply could not imagine an outcome that would not disrupt the image of open communication and I sympathized with the unpreparedness to deal with such a disruption (discussed further in Chapter 4, on possibilities for change). This invisible, but clearly felt and prohibitive barrier is characteristic of a taboo. Action is restricted by social custom, or in the terminology of games, an unspoken rule.

The “How will I know?” taboo not only concerns INGO activities, but includes deeper issues of their very identities as partners. Or as one participant said “[w]e talk about partners, they talk about donors.” Several participants went so far as to question whether their partners even think INGOs *are* partners at all, or “just” donors. Despite the added-value capacity building and long-term relations, they doubted whether locals would even partner with them without the money, reflecting that “that probably varies.” INGOs do try to find out through low-key practices that do not rock the boat too much, including more personal small-talk with trusted local partner

representatives, or asking for feedback in the very same formats where partners report the activities funded by the INGO. And when other formats, such as external and anonymous partnership evaluations are commissioned, the results can be “painful” and even cause an identity crisis (as the quote introducing Chapter 1 illustrates, from a discussion around such an external evaluation). Such crises also occur when local partners are so obviously capable at what they do that the partnership is “just money,” or “getting their ticket paid,” which makes INGOs anxious they are not “adding value” by being “partners” but just give money, like “donors.” Some wished for agreements where all partners are equal,<sup>54</sup> or locals are “lead applicants” (who sign the contract with the donor, but share funds with the INGO), just to find out “if we have any added value – do they want us?”

The anxiety experienced in relation to what partners may think but do not say caused participants to stay away from certain discussions with their local partners. Thereby they were not able to learn what their partners thought about them and the partnership – from basic things such as “did we [do this] together” to deep identity issues such as if the INGOs even *are* partners rather than donors. The anxiety around power taboos thus hindered receptive listening which may have enabled INGOs to take partners’ views into account.

*B) Anxiety of the unsaid 2: the double-edged attention to “Every breath you take”*

The second power taboo I propose exists between INGOs and their local partners can be labeled the “Every breath you take” taboo (after the song by The Police<sup>55</sup>) because it blurs the boundaries between mutually appreciated closeness and forced intimacy. As with the “How will

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<sup>54</sup> Such equal formal contracts do exist, and one example will be discussed at the end of Chapter 4, on change.

<sup>55</sup> For readers not familiar with The Police, the lyrics are written from a jealous stalker’s perspective, although it has frequently been mistaken for a love song. See interview in *New Musical Express*, (1983), Dec 01: <http://www.sting.com/news/article/76> (last accessed April 4, 2018). (A lyrics excerpt: “Every breath you take/ Every move you make /Every bond you break /Every step you take /I’ll be watching you”)

I know?” taboo described above, this topic is sensitive as it concerns the core of INGOs’ partnership approach: their claim of being close to partners, sharing ups and downs as real grassroots organizations. The “Every breath you take” taboo first appeared to me as I was observing a staff discussion about partnership in one of the INGOs, where both “international” and “local” staff were participating.<sup>56</sup> In fact, I first noticed it as an unexpected discrepancy between the reactions of “international” staff like myself and of “local” staff, that is, from the program countries, to the results of a survey with their partners.

Specifically, the person reporting on the partner survey shared that to the question (approx.) “Do you think you have enough, too little, or too much contact with [INGO]” partners had overwhelmingly answered “too much.” As I heard the answer, I laughed along with others, imagining this to be a hugely appreciated recognition given the stress (described above) that many INGO practitioners feel to make enough time with the “grassroots” “out in the field.” However, as I looked around I realized some people were not joining in. Several of them were “local” staff. A few months later, I interviewed one of them, Melanie, and she explained further why this was not a compliment to the INGO in her understanding. Instead, Melanie saw it as a sign that the INGO needed to rethink its approach to good partnership.

In order to be good partners connected to the “grassroots,” as described above, INGO practitioners stress [over] the importance of spending time with their partner organizations. Spending time together can take different forms. INGOs can invite partners to their own office or other locations for meetings and workshops, visit partners’ offices for meetings, or go to other locations to observe or take part in partners’ regular activities. Several interviewees emphasized

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<sup>56</sup> I put citation marks around “international” and “local” here to again underline the porousness of these boundaries. In most of the dissertation, I treat staff employed by the INGO but in and from the program countries as “international” practitioners as they are working within the INGO community. However, in this example, I distinguish between them as I deal with the “international”-“local” faultline *within* the organizations.

how important this frequent contact is to build a trusting relationship, to share “daily successes and challenges” in the words of one interviewee. Their experience is that this frequent contact helps the relationship in a number of ways.

For example, being in touch regularly means the local partner is assured that INGOs care about their regular work rather than just about results that are spectacular or that fit into predetermined formats. It also means the INGO and local partners can develop an everyday communication that can help when more formal or sensitive issues are discussed. Finally, through this everyday communication about little ups and downs, the INGOs get a better sense of what kinds of organizational challenges the local partners are facing. This in turn helps INGOs suggest and tailor-make capacity-building measures that seem to make more sense to the local partner than themes developed in headquarters and/or based on more general trends in the international/donor community. However, as hinted above, Melanie and other “local” staff offered a different interpretation of this constant contact.

Rather than signal trust-building, partners can also interpret the contact as a burden. Melanie told me that she had tried many times to explain to her “international” colleagues that their enactment of partnership demands a lot of time and energy from partner. After she had listed the many reasons the INGO contacted their partners to ask for input (to statements, context analyses, campaigns), I asked why she was smiling. She answered:

“Because I was thinking about this partnership evaluation, you know, where they said we have too much contact with them. I was so happy, I love this evaluation, finally the colleagues in [headquarters] could hear directly from the partners /.../ Because it’s very honest, telling the colleagues in [headquarter]. I mean [I] *know*, but what do you do...”

In another interview, another “local” staff at another INGO also stressed that “[t]he negative [with all the visits] is that [partners] can feel incompetent, because they are being followed, accompanied, monitored.” In the discussion that followed his/her comment, there was

no mention of how such risks could be countered, but instead, justifications were offered for following “every breath [partners] take” despite these risks. Such justifications include providing the INGO with first-hand knowledge about the situation, enabling both more monitoring (of partners and their activities), and an improved context analysis. While the risk of indicating distrust instead of closeness is not taboo within INGOs, bringing up these issues directly with partners risks activating rather than equalizing the power inequality between them and INGOs and is therefore avoided.

In other words, bringing up the frequent contact directly would force partners who think it is “too much” to either openly challenge the partnership as unequal or perform (and thus reproduce) an imaginary equality. For example, consider the partner’s options if the INGO asks, “are we visiting you too often, or asking too many questions?” If the partner says yes, then if INGO was suspicious to begin with, the answer can still be interpreted as if the partner organization has something to hide. But if the partner says no, there is no need to change anything. Receptivity, in the meaning of being open to change the parameters of the partnership (here, meet less or ask fewer questions), is thus ruled out in advance. Not asking or probing avoids exposing this taboo of power inequalities and allows INGOs (and partners) to carry on business as usual, as “competent peacebuilders,” but at the price of lost opportunities to listen and learn what could change the relationship to a more equal one.

In addition, even when INGOs recognize that their contact can be burdening partners, they have strong incentives to still prioritize their own goals of monitoring. In one discussion that I observed, INGO staff discussed how they “need results” for their own donor reports and communication work. Frequent visits are one way to pick up information useful for these ends, without relying on partners to “translate” their results. By successfully demonstrating that their

support achieves “results,” INGOs maintain/strengthen their status as competent peacebuilders. However, they simultaneously avoid learning why partners are telling them about other results in the first place, which may prompt changes in how INGOs work and what/who they support. Avoiding the question of too much contact thus also helps avoid uncomfortable discussions of whose needs determine how the partnership plays out, which could potentially disrupt their reputation as a competent peacebuilding actor.

In sum, these two examples of anxiously avoiding power taboos<sup>57</sup> that INGOs must not disrupt to keep their status as competent peacebuilders shows that avoiding these crucial partnership issues simultaneously hinders INGOs from listening receptively to local partners. Not being able to know what partners “really think” about them and their central practices hinders INGOs from making changes that could move the partnerships towards a more equal relation. Below, I go deeper into analyzing the different emotions and practices expressed, first using Bourdieusian practice approaches, then turning to Ahmed’s feminist tools.

### **3. First step analysis: concrete obstacles to listening in the peacebuilding field**

“So, if internationals only pay attention to their emotions, things will be fine, structures don’t matter?” *Paper discussant, 2017 (approx. quote)*

This quote is from a conference discussant of my preliminary analysis and expresses a common way of distinguishing emotions from structure, a distinction challenged by my analysis.

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<sup>57</sup> There were other contradictions and taboos which I do not elaborate on here, but which point in the same direction. For example, several interviewees experienced a contradiction in donors’ simultaneous demands for flexibility and detailed planning. That is, while donor policies increasingly emphasize the need for flexibility by any actors operating in conflict zones, in concrete cooperation donors increasingly demand details such as which mobile phones will be bought. Another example is a donor-version of the “How will I know?” taboo, where two different interviewees told me about waiting for donors to decide about (different) grants for so long (over a year in both cases) that they described it as near-death experiences for their (plans for) country offices. One interviewee said of the wait that “it nearly killed us in [country].” Such experiences do not only influence the communication with the donor, but, by underlining INGOs’ precarious financial situation, also put more pressure on the INGOs to hear immediately “useful” things from their local partners, rather than open up for unforeseen topics.

Such a distinction usually implies that “emotions” concern only the person who “has” them and the moment when they are “had,” whereas “structures” are material facts (or materially influential facts) that influence what happens to many people for a long time. However, the empirical analysis has so far demonstrated that emotions can provide an entrypoint to cluster practices and to analyze the structural demands placed on practitioners to be competent players in the field. This should not be surprising in an account inspired by Bourdieu, who pointed out that “the most fundamental *structures* of the group [are rooted in] the primary experiences of the body, which, *as is clearly seen in emotion*, takes metaphors seriously” (Bourdieu 1990, 71-72, emphases added). In this section, I thus take the opportunity to challenge my discussant’s objection by explicating how a practice-based account of emotions helps us understand structural possibilities of INGOs to listen to their local partners. To do so, I summarize how the *emotions* identified above illustrate *structural* conditions of the field, and I use two other practice-based accounts to ask about their historical trace as Bourdieu emphasized the role of time in making some rules dominant as common sense (what Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 8, call “background knowledge”). However, the limits of Bourdieusian approaches also prompt me to turn to alternatives in the following and second step of the analysis.

The emotional (aspects of) commonsense practices identified in this chapter – tension, exhaustion, and anxiety – as well as the contradictory demands and taboos revealed by analyzing them, give insights into INGO practitioners’ possibilities to listen. Tensely walking a tightrope between saying too much or too little, being exhausted from trying to be everywhere (and everyone) at the same time, and/or anxiously avoiding power taboos are not conducive states for listening for new information and ways of seeing things. INGOs thus struggle to listen receptively while simultaneously having to demonstrate their competence by navigating things



they must do (juggle contradictions) and things they must not do (disrupt power taboos). These concrete obstacles to receptive listening are underlined by the high stakes: INGOs risk valuable partnerships, essential funding, as well as potentially their identities, should they hear and strive to take into account input from local partners outside these narrow boundaries. The analysis has thus shown that practice-based research can be well served by paying attention not only to what international practitioners do but how they feel about it. Such feelings are not just individual, but sheds light on the structural conditions for their listening in the peacebuilding field.

In his book *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of tracing how such structural conditions have evolved through (practices' work over) time. More specifically, he claims that practices "can /.../ only be accounted for by relating the social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was constituted, to the social conditions in which it is implemented" (1990, 56). One way to push my analysis further is thus to ask under which historical conditions these emotional (aspects of) practices started to seem like the common sense they are today. Therefore, I briefly turn to two recent, explicitly practice-based and mainly Bourdieu-inspired accounts of peacebuilding practices to learn from their treatment of emotional (aspects of) practices and the tracing of practices through history, Autessere's (2014) *Peaceland* and Goetze's (2017) *The Distinction of Peace*. However, while both accounts contribute lessons on the importance of emotions in peacebuilding and the history of practices, both are also limited in their analysis of these aspects.

First, it is clear from both books that emotions are highly relevant (aspects of) practices. Autessere's award-winning ethnography is packed with emotions in the descriptions of her own and other practitioners' ordinary activities from the first page to the last. For example, her own rookie mistakes as a newcomer made her feel "mortified" (2014, 1), as she learns the ropes she

starts to “feel part of a transnational community” (2014, 2), even though others become “very sad” (2014, 200) about the changes necessary to fit in to that community, and those who never do fit in are “regularly marginalize[d] and ostracize[d]” (2014, 273). Despite the omnipresence of emotions, Autessere does not include them as part of her analysis of mechanisms of reproduction or as relevant to her recommendations for change. (In Chapter 4 I analyze and challenge this exclusion.)

Goetze’s (2017) field analysis traces feelings of charitable duty, attachment to education, and work-related stress to the very beginnings of UN peacebuilding in the 1960s as part of the “peacebuilding sensibilities” of the international habitus (see particularly her Chapter 5). However, just like Autessere, Goetze does not analyze these “sensibilities” *as* emotions. Therefore, she cannot (and does not) draw on writings on how emotions work in particular to reinforce or challenge practices, or their effects on relationships with local partners. While the two accounts thus seem to confirm that emotions are indeed highly relevant to being an international in peacebuilding and have been so from the beginning, neither helps us understand their particular effects on listening practices.

Second, while both accounts mention the obvious historical continuities in peacebuilding practices from colonialism,<sup>58</sup> neither investigates these continuities analytically. Autessere lists the similarities she has found between interveners and colonial officials as “the expatriate bubble, the boundaries between foreigners and local people, the politics of knowledge, the ethics of care” (2014, 253), and Goetze acknowledges that “peacebuilding does, indeed, stand in the tradition of colonialism” (2017, 222) through its social organization if not its intentions. However, as Lou Pingot (2018, 14) points out in a recent criticism of the “micro turn” (her term

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<sup>58</sup> For a country-specific examination of how local NGOs’ direct relations with donor foundations in Georgia are characterized by colonial continuities, see Japaridze (2012).

for “the practice turn”), both these accounts are “unwilling to push [these comparisons] to their logical conclusion.” Pingeot points out that focusing on the cultural bubble and misunderstandings, or on the intentions of internationals, depoliticizes peacebuilding and erases its power effects. As Pingeot (2018, 14) pointedly asks “When Autessere establishes a parallel between contemporary interveners and colonial officials, is she suggesting that the problem with colonialism was the colonial bubble/.../?” The critique illustrates the risk of losing sight of the context, the structure in which concrete practices – including emotions – are carried out. To this end, my discussant (quoted at the beginning of this section) had a point in reminding me to explicitly analyze the emotions I identified in relation to the greater spatial and temporal context.

Through the analysis so far, I have found that internationals in peacebuilding experience a lot of emotions in relation to their everyday work, and that these can place concrete obstacles in the way of their listening to local partners. Specifically, I have analyzed how the tensions as internationals tread the tightrope of the capacity contradiction, the stress as they juggle demands to be both authentically grassroots and professional, and the anxiety of disrupting power taboos around who they are and what they do, all limit their possibilities for receptive listening. In other words, analyzing peacebuilding partnership practices through the emotions practitioners experience can increase our understanding of the listening gap.

However, we have also seen that while the practice-based accounts confirm *that* emotions are present during everyday practices and have a history in peacebuilding, they stop short of analyzing *how* emotional practices work. For example, how do emotions shape the kind of international Subject we take for granted in peacebuilding and its development over time? What kind of relations do emotions enable (or encourage) with local partners? To gain more insight

into such questions, in the next section, I therefore turn to feminist knowledge traditions which have a long history of studying both emotions and power structures.

#### **4. Second step analysis: sticky with colonialism and torn between two games**

In this section, I turn to feminist work to analyze how the emotions expressed by international practitioners in peacebuilding can help us understand the listening puzzle described in Chapter 1. Specifically, I use Sara Ahmed's (2014) work on *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* which treats emotions as relational phenomena that create/constitute subjects and which are connected to social norms, histories of those norms, and projections of those norms into the future. Doing so will lead to a deeper understanding of emotions as practices that work daily to position internationals as inherently superior to their local partners. This positioning indicates that practices are still "sticky with colonialism," and keep internationals investing emotionally in structure they normatively work to change. The tension between everyday emotional practices and their intended aim, finally, shows that internationals are torn between two games, one old and one new.

The old game is characterized by colonial hierarchies and the new game which is partly imagined is characterized by more equal relations. In other words, the requirement to carry out practices sticky with colonialism hinders internationals from developing skills useful to a new, more equal game, such as listening skills. I start by explaining Ahmed's relational model of emotions, move onto how emotions work over time as investments into certain types of relations, and end by showing that such investments keep peacebuilding practitioners stuck between two different games: one characterized by the colonial hierarchies of the past and one future game aiming for (more) equal relations.

A) *Emotions as relational practices that create subjects: between partners and donors*

Emotions are often seen through what Sarah Ahmed (2014, 9) calls the “‘inside out’ model.” In this psychologically based model, emotions come from inside a person and can travel “out” to be expressed on the outside. As if Ahmed had heard the comment by my discussant cited above, she explains this view: “If I was thinking about emotions, I would probably assume that I need to look inwards, asking myself, ‘How do I feel?’” (2014, 8). Indeed, in such a model, emotions are something that individuals can *have*, as in “I have feelings, and they are mine” (2014, 8). Someone using this model may think my use of practitioners’ emotions as an entrypoint to cluster and analyze certain practices was a false fabrication, or a lucky coincidence.

Instead, the emotions identified in this chapter would be thought of as each interviewee’s private concern, and unrelated to the peacebuilding field. Decades ago, feminist scholar Elisabeth V. Spelman described similar approaches as treating emotions as “not /.../ being *about* anything. On the contrary, emotions were contrasted with and seen as potential disruptions of other phenomena that *are* about something, phenomena such as rational judgments, thoughts, and observation” (quoted in Jaggar 1989, 155, original emphasis). This view, dubbed by Spelman as the Dumb View of emotions understands emotions as the individual body’s physical and involuntary movements “such as pangs or qualms, flushes or tremors” (1989, 154-155) and thus resembles the “inside out” model.

The “inside out” model of emotions has a contender in what Ahmed (2014, 9) calls the “‘outside in’ model,” held mainly by social scientists who “have argued that emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices.” According to the “outside in” model, emotions originate outside the individual, that is, in the community or society, and move into the individual who absorbs them. An example would be the anger of the mob or the grief of the public affecting an individual in those collectives. Emotions are seen as

caused by what happens on the outside, as in “the bus driver shouted at me which made me angry,” or “when I hear this song, I get happy.” My analysis so far has more in common with this view. Based on the ‘outside in’ model, we may interpret the emotions expressed by practitioners as caused by their surroundings, for example, that they are tired because there are so many demands by other actors in the field.

However, working with a Bourdieusian approach to practices has more in common with Ahmed’s own model of emotions as relational. To get there, she first rejects the ‘inside out’ and ‘outside in’ models based on an essential assumption that they share: that of “the objectivity of the very distinction between inside and outside, the individual and the social, and the ‘me’ and the ‘we’” (Ahmed 2004, 9). That is, regardless of where emotions are supposed to come from, both the “inside out” and the “outside in” models assume that the individual and her society are two distinct entities. (The main difference is the direction of the causal arrow showing how emotions move between these distinct entities.) Rejecting this key assumption, Ahmed proposes a third alternative.

Specifically, Ahmed argues that “emotions *create* the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place” (2014, 10, emphasis added). In other words, “emotions are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects” and any entity that appears is “an effect rather than a cause” (10). This view of how emotions work to create the subject(s) is extremely similar to Bourdieu’s view of how practices work to shape the subject. His well-known key concept of *habitus* denotes a (feeling, acting, thinking) subject which is both “structured” by and “structuring” of practices (Bourdieu 1990, 52). Simply put, what people do (and are taught to do, encouraged to do, etc.) shape their dispositions and these dispositions shape (the varieties of) what they do. Similarly,

Ahmed's take on emotions means what people feel shape who they are, and who they are shape how they feel (about different things). This similarity between Bourdieu and Ahmed (throughout their respective theorizing, not simply in these examples) is the basis for my argument that emotions can be treated as an aspect of practices, or even as kinds of practices themselves, emotional practices.

Using Ahmed's work helps push my analysis of practitioners' emotions further. If emotions are relational, they do not reside *in* objects (objects can be persons, things, practices, phenomena, etc.). That is, even though we are used to thinking and talking as if a family portrait *is* happy, an insect *is* disgusting, or a stranger *is* scary, these emotions actually arise in our relation to that object. It follows that emotions are not individual but, like other relations (and other practices), we learn from the communities we are part of what is appropriate for us. The stronger this particular emotion is connected to the identity of the group, the more likely you are to feel the same way. The more a family uses their photo to connect to positive values and "happy" moments, the more likely you are to think of it as a happy photo. If your peer group identifies as those who would never eat insects, demonstrates disgust at the mention, shares horror stories of other groups who do etc, you are likely (but not determined) to react viscerally at the mere thought of putting an insect in your mouth. If your society encourages you to shout "stranger danger" when unknown people approach you, restricts interaction or travel, and teaches history as a series of violent encounters with "others," you are likely to treat others with hesitation or fear; the stranger has become a scary figure. But in fact, these emotions are part of your *relation to* the object. It is thus not the donor report itself that *is* frustrating, the question of what this partnership is that *is* anxiety-inducing, or even the field visit that *is* fun or the

networking that *is* meaningful. Instead these feelings can indicate (but not determine) and help us analyze the actors' relative positions (to the objects of their feelings) in the field.

Using a relational view of emotions to revisit the feelings expressed in this chapter, for instance, makes it quite clear that the tension and stress that practitioners experience as they juggle contradictions position them in between their local partners and their institutional donors. In addition, this is a hierarchical rather than a horizontal positioning. Despite the INGO rhetoric of different knowledge complementing each other, the hierarchy is visible in the practical priority: local partners must *first* learn to account for our tax money, fill in our applications and report forms, organize their groups and activities according to our standards and formats. *Then*, if there is still time, energy, resources left, they can spend these in other ways. The hierarchy is also visible through the different values attached to INGOs' and their partners' "complementing" knowledge: no matter how relevant partners' "local" knowledge is, it is still local. That is, there is nothing of value in it for internationals, except perhaps how to act to feel more secure in the locals' location. The surprise or excitement felt at exceptions, when partners "could give *us* trainings" underlines the dominant evaluation.

Similarly, the acceptance of the stress accompanying increasing donor demands for detailed documentation indicate that these practices are seen as necessary to comply with, and to pass on to partners. Following emotions thus prompts us to ask questions about how INGOs negotiate their middle-position between donors and partners. What do their sense (or evaluation) of some practices as compulsory and others as luxury add-ons say about their perceived agency to challenge and/or accept what is considered competent peacebuilding, about who is considered knowledgeable/powerful to set the standards (speak), and about who is supposed to follow and adapt (listen)? To the extent that these feelings are taken for granted, or generally accepted as the



natural order of things, they indicate a structure. In contrast, deviations, situations where individuals or sub-groups feel “out of place” as rebels or outliers indicate diversity, contestation, alternatives, possibilities. Rather than considering emotions as individual, we can thus see how emotions indicate links between the individual actor and its political context.

Of course, that the personal is political is an old feminist insight. Already in 1989, Alison Jaggar wrote about “outlaw emotions.” Jaggar defined some experiences of emotions as outlaw because they were “distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values” (1989, 166). As an example, Jaggar took a woman who experiences an ordinary instance of patriarchy, “male sexual banter,” as “uncomfortable” or even frightening rather than flattery. At first, this woman “may be confused, unable to name [her] experience, [she] may even doubt [her] own sanity” (1989, 166). However, her sharing the experience with others allows the formation of a subculture which may “systematically oppose the prevailing perceptions, norms, and values” (1989, 166) and thus contribute to structural change. In a way, we can see women in this position as similarly caught between an old and a new game, as I find below that the internationals in peacebuilding are. I will get back to the role of emotions in change work at the end of Chapter 4, when discussing potential for change. For now, I will use Jaggar’s example to support my argument that paying attention to whether emotions are “common” or “outlaw” can help analyzing the subject’s position in relation to the dominant norms.

In this subsection, using Ahmed’s model of the sociality of emotions has thus helped me analyze some of these tensions that hinder receptive listening as indicating INGOs’ conflicted belonging to the different communities of partners and donors, as on the one hand civil society organizations and on the other Western funders. In the next subsection I add attention to the

conflicting identities of the (repressed/forgotten) past of colonialism and the (imagined) future of equal partnership relations.

*B) Emotions as investments over time: practices sticky with colonialism*

Just like Bourdieu's logic of practice, Ahmed's model of the sociality of emotions pays attention to time. After all, Ahmed points out, attribution of emotions to particular objects (practices, persons, etc.) does not start afresh with each situation but develops through repetition and variations of previous situations in history. Based on the history of a particular society, certain types of family photos are generally considered happy, certain insects disgusting, and certain strangers scary. In other words, emotions and how they are attributed tend to "stick" to their objects over time. In this subsection, therefore, I analyze the emotional practices identified in the chapter as tensions not only between the present communities of partners and donors, but also between a sense of what has been in the past and what may be in the future.

More specifically, analyzing emotions as investments made over time (and as effects of previous generations' investments) helps us understand how partnership practices, in tweaking Ahmed's terminology, can be "sticky with colonialism" even though internationals explicitly aim for equal relationships. Using Ahmed's model thus helps push the analysis further than the practice-based works cited above, which stop short of analyzing colonial continuities and instead just shrug them off as non-intentional or note them as part of what should change. Instead, bringing emotional practices into the analysis helps me analyze how such continuities explain internationals' conflicting attachments and the continuation of non-listening in partnerships, even though "they want to and know they should" listen as the overall research puzzle establishes.

We saw above how emotions are part of the practices of socialization of individuals into particular communities, and Ahmed points to the collective and temporal aspect of socialization. That is, collective histories shape which emotions are (more readily) available to and attributable

to groups. Emotions are thus part of constituting those groups. For example, Ahmed demonstrates how fear “sticks” to black people in racist societies (like Sweden, the US, the UK). That is, black people are more likely to be seen as being scary than white people because of historical relations of racism. Through times of conquest, colonization, and slavery, black people have been portrayed as dangerous and less than human. Rather than attributing the fear to these historical relations, fear “sticks” to black people in relation to white majority norms.

Similarly, we can see a direct continuation of colonial practices in internationals’ emotional practices of positioning themselves as different and above local partners, in regard to capacities, accountability, and rationality. Indeed, a “central feature of imperial ideology, international law, and Eurocentric method of social inquiry is the assumption of a European ideal against which all else – all other societies, histories, traditions, value systems, and institutions – are compared and measured, an ideal to which all the rest should aspire to conform” (Gruffydd Jones 2006, 8). Internationals’ feelings of having superior capacity to their local partners reveal the international ideal in peacebuilding partnerships. In other words, it is taken for granted that INGOs’ knowledge is universally valuable and that partners should strive to acquire it. When the reverse happens, internationals are baffled by the fact that “*they* could give *us* trainings.” The exceptionality of (more) equal practices thus reveals the colonial hierarchy of the norm.

Another example of colonial continuities is the asymmetrical sense of accountability. Despite the emphasis on equal partnerships and mutual trust, (some) institutional donors feel they must have a 64-page contract with INGOs, who in turn must explain it to local partners. According to my interviewee, however, donors keep the right to unilaterally break contracts at any point as “[Western capital] politics” changes. This unequal accountability bears an uncanny resemblance to unilaterally broken contracts between colonial conquering states and indigenous

groups. Together, the positioning of internationals as having the right to set the terms for the interaction and being in the right about how to do things continues colonial power patterns.

Finally, as emotions are seen as the opposite of rationality, they only become relevant to understand those deemed less rational. In other words, emotions are only relevant when analyzing the behavior of colonized people (as well as that of women, children, gay men, or other groups with lower status<sup>59</sup>), deemed to be at a lower level of development (Smith 1999, 30). On the contrary, emotions of the rational, privileged actors are seen as irrelevant for their actions. The implications will be developed in Chapters 3 and 4. Here, I just want to note that this colonial pattern of attributing emotionality is reflected in my interviewees' treatment of their own emotions as irrelevant to our discussion of partnership.<sup>60</sup> Emotions that bubbled up were explicitly put aside when my interviewees wanted to put our discussions back on track. This indicates that expressing emotions is not part of things they must do, but rather something they must *not* do, in order to demonstrate competence. Rather than treating emotions as individual we thus see how they can be indicative of structural power relations and political histories. In tweaking Ahmed's terminology, we could say that these practices are "sticky with colonialism," which keeps international and local actors stuck in colonial relations. In other words, emotions connected to everyday practices work as continuous, practical, embodied, daily investments which practitioners make into the very same historical and hierarchical structures which partnerships aim to dismantle.

Therefore, going back to my discussant, this chapter's opening quote expresses a false opposition between emotions and structures. Practices have material components. The material setting develops along with the social one, and dominant practices help to bring our attention in

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<sup>59</sup> Bourdieu makes a similar reflection on the connection between power positions and emotionality (1990, 78).

<sup>60</sup> Regulating emotions is also part of professionalization, as developed by Hoschild (1979) and others.

line with the dominant dispositions. This goes for emotional practices too. The happy family portrait is visible on the wall (unlike evidence of shameful pasts which is hidden away), the disgusting insects are not available in the common supermarket (unlike giant shrimps), and the scary strangers are channeled through separate lines at the airport (unlike VIP guests who take the fast track). These structures then tend to reproduce the subjectivities who strive for such happy families, reject eating insects, and avoid strangers. That is, emotional practices are relational and thus shape collective subjects in relation to each other – and to their environment which is shaped over time to in turn shape subjectivities. However, we cannot directly derive a structure from observing an emotion (as in “he is angry and therefore I conclude he has no power,” for example). In Jaggar’s words, our emotions are “always subject to reinterpretation and revision” (1989, 169). Keeping this ambiguity in mind, emotional practices are one type of data that can help the analyst bring lived experiences together with structures of power.

While this subsection has shown that internationals’ practices today are still sticky with colonialism, my claim is not simply that internationals’ emotions show that they are in the same position vis-à-vis their partners as colonizers were to colonized people. Instead, I interpret their conflicting emotions (tension, stress, anxiety) as indicating not only a conflict between different groups (partners and donors) but as embodying a tension between a colonial past and an imagined future. In other words, I find internationals torn between two different games, one old and one new, negotiating this position emotionally in the present. In the next subsection, I investigate this tension between two games further.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Just as Bourdieu’s use of “game” is different from game-theoretical approaches, my idea of two different games are different from Putnam’s (1988) “two-level games” in IR. However, there are similarities. Putnam claims that when national politicians act in international negotiations, they simultaneously play “games” at two levels: the international arena and domestic politics. Similarly, I claimed in the previous section that INGOs “play” in two arenas/communities of practice: as partners/civil society organizations and as donors/Northern actors who fund Southern ones. In this section though, I distinguish between two temporal games rather than two socio-spatial ones.

*C) Torn between two games: conflicting emotional investments*

In this subsection, I analyze internationals' conflicting emotions as embodying not only the contradictory demands for competence in two different groups (partners and donors) but also in two different times: the past and the future. More specifically, I find that the emotions they express show that they are torn between two different games, one old colonial game characterized by hierarchy and one new, imagined game with (more) equal relations. In other words, I agree with Goetze (2017, 222) who thinks internationals do not have colonial intentions. However, rather than using the lack of intention as a reason to dismiss the identified continuities with colonialism, I analyze what it means for internationals – and particularly for their possibilities to listen receptively to their local partners – to live and work in the tension between the colonial past and a more equal future. Analyzing emotions using Ahmed's model of emotions as relational and historical thus illuminates the structural characteristics of the peacebuilding field in a new way.

In the old, colonial game, power relations are organized hierarchically, whereas in the new (or future) game, relations are (more) equal and exchange is mutual. According to the old, colonial rules, as we have seen above, INGOs are supposed to know better than their local partners and exercise control in all conceivable areas. However, in the future (and partly imagined) game, INGOs are supposed to listen to and learn from their local partners in joint peacebuilding projects. In such a future, equal game, INGOs and local partners have equal competence (and their competence have equal worth); being professional is not prioritized over being grassroots (for either "local" or "international" organizations); and power taboos are not systematically slanted<sup>62</sup> to make INGOs tiptoe around questions about the relationship while

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<sup>62</sup> I use "systematically" here to indicate that I do not believe any relations can be void of power dynamics, but I do believe that structural asymmetries can be decreased.

monitoring partners to balance potentially biased information from them. The present tensions show that, as practice-based research has also documented, internationals are reflexive about their conflicting ambitions – they *know* that they are balancing contradictory demands. However, ignoring emotions leaves out both how internationals embody these tensions and how they – despite their intentions – continually keep investing in the old game, and how this hinders the development of a new, more equal game that they (say they) want.

The need to constantly demonstrate competence in the old game hinders INGOs from developing the skills and practices necessary for the future game, such as receptive listening. Consider the wording from the 2016 outcome document of the Nairobi conference again (introduced in Chapter 1). Needless to say, the “donor-recipient relationships of the past” are not instantly “replaced” because of the Nairobi document’s declaration that this is the case. (Unfortunately, words are not *that* performative.) However, as this discourse of peacebuilding and development demands of players who want to be considered competent at the new game to have equal partnerships, INGOs must act *as if* they do. This need to uphold appearances in (and of) the game, to be “good sports,” renders INGOs unable to listen receptively for actual capacities and capacity building needs – theirs or partners; undermines their ability to challenge the contradictory demands of authenticity; and inclines them to view any disruption of existing power taboos as “unthinkable” (Bourdieu 1990, 54).<sup>63</sup>

Using the insight that peacebuilding practices oscillate temporally between two games helps us understand the “How will I know?” power taboo better by highlighting that INGOs need to act in both games, including as if the new game is already in town. After all, the Nairobi

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<sup>63</sup> In a recent conference paper, Hirblinger (2018) makes a distinction between practices which treat the world “as is” and those which treat the world “as if,” suggesting that practice-based peace researchers could benefit from paying more attention to the latter (as this subsection also confirms).

document does not *aim* to replace “the donor-recipient relationships of the past”, it decisively declares that these already “have been replaced.” If so, talking and acting as a donor would mean INGOs are out of touch and hopelessly old school. Bringing up, or even implying that local partners may be withholding something could disrupt relations, perhaps even insult the partner, who might react with “are we not equal – why would I not say what I think?” and reveal the INGOs incompetence under the new rules. The risk of being deemed incompetent reduces the motivation for internationals to listen receptively to what partners think and causes them to avoid power taboos.

Avoiding the power taboo – and not finding out if they are “really” one or the other – allows INGOs to keep their identity ambiguous and operate simultaneously in the two games. Since much of the material relations are decisively hierarchical, INGOs *know* that they are also performing donor practices. Peacebuilding funding (almost always) moves from donors, to INGOs, to local partners, in what is often talked about as a “chain,” with a very clear direction. The local is always “the ones farthest out in the chain,” or simply “out there [waving hands away from the body]” according to interviewees.<sup>64</sup> The role of the INGO is to control locals’ use of that money, and increasingly, their general development as an organization, and the donor takes on the same role towards the INGO. These practices simply reproduce the hierarchy that has led to ineffective peacebuilding and the need for equal partnerships in the first place and thus do not facilitate receptive listening. Participants’ suggestions for agreements of formal equality or reversed roles could lead to openings (although non-contractual inequalities remain). But for now, the need to competently perform practices from the old game motivates INGOs not to commit too strongly to being “equal” and shows some advantages of an ambiguous identity.

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<sup>64</sup> These quotes are from donor interviews, but “the chain” was commonly referred to by INGOs as well.



However, this ambiguity also takes its toll as illustrated by the anxiety experienced (and discussed further in the section on change in Chapter 4). There, I argue that in order to enable change and the development of alternative practices, INGOs should explicitly address this ambiguity (or even invisibility as Chapters 3 and 4 will show is a more apt description).

#### **D) Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analyzed negative emotions experienced by INGO practitioners as they go about their daily tasks to examine any clues these could give us regarding the puzzling lack of listening by peacebuilding internationals to their local partners. Doing so has shown first, that practitioners commonly experience tension, exhaustion, and anxiety, emotional states that in themselves are not conducive for listening for new information and creative understandings. In addition, these emotions reveal things INGOs must do (juggle contradictions) and things they must not do (disrupt power taboos) to demonstrate they are competent players in the peacebuilding field. The high stakes involved, that INGOs may lose partnerships, funding, or their own identity, place further obstacles in the way of them listening receptively to local partners. The first step analysis thus contributes to understanding the listening gap by helping us cluster other practices, but stops short of analyzing how emotions themselves work to keep internationals invested in the present game.

As a second step in the analysis, I have integrated feminist research into my practice-based approach, which provided additional insights into the structural field of peacebuilding. In particular, Sara Ahmed's (2014) work on *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* aligns well with Bourdieu's (1990) work on the *Logic of Practice* and provides a basis for investigating emotions as a type of practices (or as distinct aspects of practices). Particularly two aspects of Ahmed's work were relevant to this chapter. First, emotions are relational rather than originating in either

individuals *or* the context. This means that emotions contribute to co-constituting the subject *and* their context. Emotions can thus be used as an analytical tool to understand the subject's sense of dominant norms and of its position in relation to those norms. Second, it is crucial to pay attention to time. History is vital in shaping norms, positions, and emotions. This means that when subjects have emotional experiences about certain objects, those experiences are not created afresh in the moment but rely on previous social (and personal) histories, where certain emotions "stick" to certain objects in ways that tend to reproduce dominant norms and subject positions. Based on these insights, I argue that some of the practices of INGO practitioners are still "sticky with colonialism." In addition, the analysis shows that the peacebuilding field is characterized not by one, but by two games: one old hierarchical, and one emerging game with more equal relations.

Much of the exhaustion and anxiety INGOs experience is caused by simultaneously demonstrating their competence in these two games, with partly contradictory "rules." According to the rules of the old game, INGOs must know more than partners, and control partners as well as their funding. However, in the new game, INGOs must be involved in mutual learning with partners, be close with their partners, and "base everything [they] do on what they [local partners] say." Therefore, INGOs benefit from making their identity ambiguous, shared partly with donors and partly with local partners. Such ambiguity helps INGOs navigate between the demands of the two games, but also has a price. Given the built-in contradictions in being partner and donor, INGOs risk dissolving as distinct actors, being everything and nothing, so to speak, which further motivates donors and partners to develop direct connections with each other. Analyzing the emotions expressed by INGO practitioners thus adds to our understanding of the listening puzzle by highlighting their positioning between two different games.

In sum, integrating feminist insights has pushed the analysis beyond current practice-based research on peacebuilding internationals. While such research descriptively acknowledges a lot of emotions as a part of practitioners' everyday (Autessere 2014), even from the beginning of peacebuilding (Goetze 2017), it also excludes emotions from analysis completely (Autessere) or treats them as exclusively *intellectual* sensibilities (Goetze). That is, existing analyses stop short of analyzing emotions as embodied (aspects of) practices that help us understand power dynamics. This is, in my view, part of why these accounts also stop short of recognizing the colonial continuities they find as part of problematic power dynamics. Instead, Goetze dismisses colonial patterns today as non-intentional and Autessere treats them as technical or cultural issues. However, as Pingeot (2018) points out, the problem with colonialism was not that colonizers lived in a bubble, but that they exercised power illegitimately. Recognizing emotions as (practical, daily, embodied) investments can help us understand how internationals who are so intellectually (and perhaps morally, ethically) invested in equal partnership and local ownership keep reproducing problematic colonial practices.

This chapter has shown that negative emotions expressed by practitioners indicate daily, and embodied investments that keep INGOs practically invested in continuing historical lines laid out during colonialism. In the next chapter, therefore, I investigate if positive emotions indicate practices which lead towards the desired future game of (more equal) relationships and receptive listening.

## CHAPTER 3: POSITIVE EMOTIONS

### Proud, achieving, and responsible internationals who listen within limits

In Chapter 2, I analyzed practitioners' expressions of negative experiences of emotions in relation to their everyday practices. The first step, a practice-based analysis, led me to argue that emotions alert us to tensions inherent in things that INGOs *must do and must not do* to demonstrate competence as actors in the peacebuilding "game."<sup>65</sup> The demands on INGOs (from their local partners and donors) to juggle contradictions and avoid disrupting power taboos place concrete obstacles in the way of their possibilities to listen receptively to their local peacebuilding partners. Being tense, exhausted, and anxious are not conducive states for receptive listening. This first step of the analysis thus immediately provided a partial, hands-on answer to the overall research question "Why are internationals so bad at listening to local partners, even though they want to and know they should?"

In the second step of the analysis, I integrated insights from feminist<sup>66</sup> research to treat emotions as social practices that do their work over time and can signal the subject's sense of dominant norms and its own position in relation to those norms. Based on this, I also argued that the identified, conflicting emotions of tension, exhaustion, and anxiety, signal that INGOs are not only torn between two different communities of practice (partners and donors) but also between an old and a new game of peacebuilding. In the old, hierarchical game, practices are "sticky with colonialism" and INGOs must demonstrate control of and superior knowledge to their local partners. On the contrary, the new, and mostly imagined game demands a more equal

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<sup>65</sup> I use "game" in Bourdieu's (1990) sense, not as playing for fun, but as when social actors are "players" organized around common stakes, trying to achieve their goals and simultaneously struggling for positions and resources in a social "field."

<sup>66</sup> Chapter 1 explains that I use "feminist" intersectionally, that is, as including feminist, postcolonial, and queer works, without treating them as unitary, or completely overlapping categories. This aligns with Ahmed (2017).

interaction. Navigating this ongoing tension encourages INGOs to keep hoping that their intended goal and talk of equality will somehow make even colonial practices lead to equal relations despite the “bad” feelings this clash leads to. However, in addition to the negative experiences analyzed in Chapter 2, practitioners also expressed “happy” feelings, such as pride, Yes!-moments, and responsibility. In this chapter, I analyze these positive experiences of emotions<sup>67</sup> to find out what kind of intention they embody. More specifically, I ask whether we can use their “happiness” as an indication that they are pointing towards the explicitly intended “happy” future of equal relations.

In addition, I analyze positive emotions because feminist international relations (IR) has been criticized from “within” for over-emphasizing negative emotions. For example, Penttinen argues that such a one-sided focus on negative emotions is problematic. First, it provides a skewed picture of war and conflict. By not seeking to understand what positive experiences these situations can provide, we will lack understanding of the political dynamics of war (2013, 3). Second, conclusions may be of little value, or even counterproductive as we will “lag behind in creating new knowledge of how to build practices, which would indeed increase well-being, joy and self-healing” (2013, 3). Additionally, Penttinen refers to the feminist stand that research contributes to constructing the world rather just observing it. Thus, the researcher has a responsibility to cultivate practices that pay attention to “positive” dynamics as a part of her input to the world (2013, 14). These arguments provided additional motivation for analyzing practitioners’ positive experiences of emotions.

I begin this chapter by identifying three such positive experiences of emotions: pride, Yes!-moments of achievements, and responsibility. It turns out these emotions provide an

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<sup>67</sup> My categorization of emotions is based how practitioners talk rather than psychological or biological criteria. Based on this, I use “positive” and “negative” as simplifying shorthands rather than as normative evaluations.

analytical entrypoint into what INGO practitioners *want to do and think they should do* as competent actors in the peacebuilding field. Specifically, I group these practices under the headings of “facilitating” between different kinds of local actors (pride), “translating” between local partners and international decision-makers (Yes!-moments), and “linking” partners to international donor institutions (responsibility). Under each heading three examples are presented and at the end of the chapter analyzed in a two-step analysis.

In the first step of the analysis, I use a practice-based approach which leads to two striking findings. First, I demonstrate that to be successful in these practices, INGOs *draw on precisely the middle-position* that was problematic in Chapter 1. Apparently, this position in-between donors and partners does not only push and pull INGOs back and forth. Instead, under certain conditions (that I draw out from the examples) it also enables them to facilitate, translate, and link actors for peacebuilding purposes. Second, while Chapter 2 brought out a range of obstacles to listening, this chapter surprisingly shows that INGOs *do listen*. In fact, they have to listen carefully to different local actors, as well as to international decision-makers and donors in order to facilitate, translate, and link. At first glance then, it is puzzling what the findings contribute to the overall question “Why are internationals so bad at listening to local partners?” Is the answer from a practice approach which takes emotions (somewhat) into account simply “they are not”?

To deepen the analysis, in a second step I add another layer of feminist theory which brings out the *limits* to listening in the data. As feminist scholar Carol Cohn notes in a classic article, feminists are often helped in making sense of seemingly senseless findings by bringing in a power perspective and asking “Who (or what) is the *subject* here?” (1987, 711, emphasis in original). Research on receptive listening often emphasizes the importance of orientation your

attention toward the other, the speaker (Park-Kang 2011). Therefore, I use Sara Ahmed's (2006) notion of "orientation" to examine *toward what* internationals' listening is oriented.

While this examination shows that INGOs' attention is extremely oriented toward local partners (their organizations, their personal lives, their national politics), it also adds two surprising findings. First, I find that INGO attention is mainly oriented toward supporting partners *within the "old" game*, that is, within the power structures still infused with colonial logic. Second, the orientation toward their local partner is so dominant that *INGOs themselves become invisible*. In fact, one could say that through their daily practices of asking, training, etc., INGOs patch up an "invisibility cloak," which hides their organizations, their personal lives, and their politics from the partnership agenda. These topics are completely off the (partnership) table. While bringing much of the administrative infrastructure through core practices like funding, INGOs thus become invisible as *political* actors.

The argument of invisible INGOs (indeed internationals at large) will be explored further in Chapter 4 on the invisible international Subject. However, Chapter 3 makes several contributions. Empirically and methodologically, it provides another example of how analyzing (also positive) emotions can provide concrete and structural insights into conditions for listening in peacebuilding. Theoretically, it contributes another building block to a practice-based analysis of emotions by examining how such emotional practices orient subjects and their attention to objects. And practically, it identifies several entrypoints for change (a weak point of practice approaches, discussed further in Chapter 4). These entrypoints are different from the simplistic notion I started with of "positive" emotions unequivocally indicating new-game examples.

Below follows the empirical examination of practitioners' positive experiences of feeling pride, Yes!-moments of achievement, and responsibility in connection with practices of

facilitating, translating, and linking actors for peacebuilding purposes. As themes recur, the first examples are dealt with in more depth.

### **1. Pride: facilitating between different local actors**

Facilitation between different locals is often thought of as a kind of ideal type of peacebuilding support, particularly if the initiative comes from the local actors themselves. As “outsiders,” INGOs can have advantages in a conflict situation and provide space for actors to explore possible solutions. Facilitation does not have to be between actors on different “sides” of the armed conflict. In societies experiencing conflict, other social divides (gender, generational, class) can raise the tension in society. However, such dynamics are often pushed aside and left without arenas for non-violent resolution (Paffenholz 2010). In Example 1, Elsa facilitates between civil society activists on different sides of the main line of conflict. In Example 2, Carrie’s team facilitates civil society networking across different themes, such as land rights and water issues. In Example 3, Sara’s presence facilitates a workshop on land issues between different stakeholders, such as land owners and women farmers. In these situations, INGO practitioners felt proud of the results, either using the word pride explicitly or telling the story as an example of good partnership on their behalf.

We will see that to create these “good examples” of facilitation, INGOs consciously draw on their in-between status, as well as demonstrate their listening skills. The mix between international and civil society identity gives them a flexible status in relation to different local actors (who may for example want to learn from, connect to, or impress INGOs), and can enable more presence and trust (than other internationals or locals). For example, where a governmental organization would have to follow official protocols, the relative informality of INGO facilitation can encourage workshop participants to speak more openly or suggest ideas. Their



mixed identity can thus be helpful for facilitation practices which involve seeking out different types of actors.

Facilitation requires listening to these different actors, to their priorities and needs – in relation to the context – in order to suggest common themes and concerns where the INGO can “add value” to the process. These success stories thus demonstrate that INGOs develop listening skills as part of their “feel for the game.” For example, they must constantly balance between pushing partners to consider other actors’ perspectives and pausing to listen to partners to understand why they may be resisting such perspectives. The examples further illuminate conditions which help INGOs to listen in practice, such as having a nuanced understanding of partners (rather than feeling they know everything in advance and do not need to listen) and plenty of time (rather than having to hurry, basing what they do on previous understandings).

However, there are also limits to INGO listening, revealed by the contradictions in their accounts. Among these are contradictions between their definitions of results and those of donors, between different understandings of what partners want, and between their own roles as outsiders or insiders. The two-step analysis at the end of the chapter will reveal how many of these “happy” listening practices in fact continue INGOs’ investments in lines which point toward the old, colonial game they are trying to change.

*A) Ex 1, Elsa: “[She] will bring a bottle of wine from the dad’s village. And that’s a result”*

In the first example, Elsa, a practitioner with more than twenty years of experience, describes facilitating a workshop with civil society groups from both sides of a conflict. Several of the people involved had worked with the INGO before, but there were also new participants. Elsa works at the INGO headquarter and complements the country team colleagues who have more contact with partners. The team was nervous before the workshop as the partners had not

met in a long time and since the last meeting there had been an outburst of armed hostilities. Elsa described the atmosphere before the meeting as tense, and I ask her how it went.

“I think it went really well. *Much better than you could expect.*<sup>68</sup> We didn’t take as many decisions as we had planned, but that was less important actually. It was more, well, you know, when you get the ones that don’t fit into the matrix – those results.”

The results Elsa mentions are at first a bit difficult to understand, so I quote her at length as she explains:

“So, they had brought some candy from [country], as they always do, it’s not that tasty, but they had different kinds. And then [name], one of the IDPs, she said something like ‘oh, can I take one of each, for my dad?’ And it just became so *obvious*, I think, to people. That whatever else, there are people who have lived there, and who are *longing* for the place. So, they decided that the next time they meet, then [name] will bring a bottle of wine from the dad’s village. And that’s a *result*. That’s a result that you can’t ... and that happened because I let them have a longer break than they should, because I started [feeling] like, ‘shit, something’s happening over there, let’s let them continue.’”

Elsa’s story illustrates the practical skills she thinks allowed these results to develop: the ability to pay close attention to seemingly banal remarks about candy and wine to notice that “something’s happening over there,” the flexibility to pause to “let them have a longer break,” even if there will not be “as many decisions,” not to mention the cool to relinquish control to dynamics that you are not directly involved in. This practical feel for the process thus involves careful listening, and while results may not have “fit into the matrix,” they did not end with candy and wine.

As the group moved on to agreeing on the terminology to use in the project,<sup>69</sup> Elsa found that the participants who had had this connection over candy and wine were willing to make

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<sup>68</sup> As in the other chapters, italics within a quote signal that the interviewee emphasized these words.

<sup>69</sup> Terminology is often a stumbling block for cross-conflict peacebuilding projects as words can imply a certain interpretation, for example, whether an area is ‘occupied’ or ‘liberated,’ or whether people from there are ‘refugees’ (implying they have crossed borders) or ‘IDPs,’ etc.

greater compromises than others. Giving some background, she explains that there had been tension in the group between those from “the capitals” who question if people who fled the conflict region more than twenty years ago are really suffering or even want to return, and people who themselves or whose relatives had to escape and leave everything behind. These sensitive topics require the facilitator to skillfully balance between pushing the participants, perhaps out of their comfort zone, and pausing to listen to them.

Elsa illustrates the practical “feel” this balancing act requires with another example of her INGO’s role in these meetings, which I also quote at length:

“I think our role is to create a place where they, where they feel *safe*. Where *everyone* feels safe and everyone feels *seen*. And that you go against them, when someone starts lashing out, that you stop it. I mean, you have to, they’re allowed to fight, to say lots of things, but when it starts, you know...there was one person from [capital] who said she saw some survey that most of those who had fled [the conflict region] didn’t want to return, and she said it [even though] one of the IDPs from there, and who is older, [had] said ‘what my grandfather always wanted was to see his house before he died.’ Well, then /.../ one really has to show that this is not your [sweeping her hand as if brushing off someone], ‘you don’t have the, what’s it called, right, or privileged interpretation here, others do.’ And you have to stop them when they are completely off track. So that you are *there*.”

As the example shows, it is difficult for Elsa to verbally articulate her feel for the game, when she does what, when she pushes and when she pauses, so I parse her account further below.

On the one hand, as a facilitator, she works to make everybody feel safe which means stopping people who start “lashing out.” On the other hand, if everybody is also to be “*seen*,” participants must be allowed to “say lots of things,” even to “fight.” But even so, there are still moments when they may be “completely off track” and, as the facilitator, you “have to stop them.” It seems facilitation demands constantly making decisions in the moment, just as Bourdieu described the practical feel of a rugby player who is constantly assessing the situation

physically: his speed running up the field, the positions of his team mates, etc. Elsa's ending emphasis on presence thus seems appropriate: "that you are *there*."

But being "there" must be combined with skills to make these decisions. Elsa contrasts her own feelings before the meeting with those of her colleagues who invited her to facilitate: "the team were really nervous. *I* felt that we have had these situations before. [The team] were nervous that [partners] would start shouting, and I was nervous that they wouldn't. /.../ That [partners] would just be polite." When I asked why she felt that way, Elsa explained that there has to be something to facilitate: "Well, then you have to get them talking somehow, then you must be much more pushy [or] there's no point." There would be "no point," because there is an agenda for the meeting. Both the participating partners and Elsa's INGO are working for peace, they want to change the dynamics between people in this region and see this workshop as one step. The role of the INGO is to facilitate the process.

To play this facilitation role and move peacebuilding forward, what conditions are helpful to INGO listening in practice? Turning back to Elsa, she highlights the importance of partners' trust. "They want me there because they trust me," she summarizes, before discussing a range of factors she and her INGO consider vital to earn this trust. These factors include preparing these sensitive meetings holistically, drawing on different expertise, and noting partners' priorities to design agendas and sequence the process. Trust also requires balancing pushing partners to consider different opportunities with pausing to allow partners to reject steps they do not believe in. Three underlying conditions to these factors shaping facilitation stand out: the INGO's attitude toward partners, its long-term time perspective, and donor frameworks regarding results, i.e. the 'matrix' that Elsa mentioned in the opening quote.

First, the INGO's attitude toward their local partner shows considerable nuance rather than the simple "mission civilisatrice" that INGOs and other peacebuilding internationals are sometimes charged with (Paris 2002). On the one hand, Elsa states she has high expectations that partners will actively engage in the sensitive discussions and that this "has to do with partnership, because I, my stand is that they have said *yes* to coming, /.../ to working together in this project. And then they are responsible for what they are doing there /.../ and therefore, I think you can demand quite a lot." Pushing, however, must not go too far. Elsa emphasizes that partners must be able to trust that the INGO never will "force them to say things they don't want to say." When I ask what this could mean, she exemplifies it could be saying: " 'let's write a statement now' and have it pre-written; [jokes] UN Women style." Together, this shows that INGOs, at least in proud moments, are helped by a nuanced understanding of partners, which should promote listening compared to a simplified view which may make INGOs feel as if they have the answers already.

Second, listening based on and informing such a nuanced understanding takes time.<sup>70</sup> When I speak with Elsa, the importance of time comes up over and over again. Time matters for the particular meeting as well as for the general relationship. Before partner meetings time to prepare is necessary to avoid starting over. For example, the facilitator must read up on the context and previous project steps, and perhaps organize separate meetings with the conflicting groups to deal with sensitive issues. During meetings having time allows for informal

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<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth F. Cohen's recent book *The Political Value of Time* seems useful for a closer examination of how the aspect of time in listening practices is connection to reproducing or challenging peacebuilding power hierarchies, as suggested by the following quote "Just as the unremunerated or undervalued time of workers becomes the vehicle for their economic exploitation in Marx, the unrewarded or undervalued time of political subjects becomes the vehicle for their political domination. /.../ When an individual or group's time is undervalued or devalued by politics they experience something akin to a political version of exploitation. They lose rights and political power that other similarly situated people acquire and exercise in time" (2018, 17). However, as there was so little time (sic) left until the dissertation deadline, I could not engage with the book further than its introduction.

conversations, such as those about candy, and for unplanned breaks when “something’s happening.” It is often necessary to hold a series of meetings (rather than one-offs) to make something out of the results, especially if these were unexpected and “don’t fit into the matrix.” And, as we have seen, a facilitator with experience (over time) can influence the dynamics of the discussion. For the organizational relationship, working together for a long time, perhaps years, allows the INGO to develop the trust of local groups that enables them to play the facilitator role competently, to ask difficult questions and push for new solutions without “forc[ing] partners.” Elsa says: “It’s about changing power structures. It takes time. You can’t show results after six months; you have to be happy if you can do that after a few years.” Time is thus a crucial condition for INGO listening.

Third, time is money. That is, to get the time needed for meaningful peacebuilding results, INGOs need to align their view of meaningful results with that of their donors. Institutional donors (who usually provide the bigger grants) use application and reporting formats which, as shown in Chapter 1, pressure INGOs to limit their listening to hearing what fits the format. For example, most donors demand that INGOs summarize their plans in a ‘matrix’ including detailed specification of desirable ‘results’ from each activity, as well as from the project as a whole. That is why Elsa, a bit tongue-in-cheek, emphasizes that offering to bring a bottle of wine is “a *result*” of the kind that does not “fit into the matrix.” Needless to say, when applying for money for peacebuilding workshops, Elsa’s INGO hardly foresaw the candy conversation and its role in opening up for greater compromises and – if taken care of – potentially new, creative initiatives to mobilize conflict constituencies for peace.

Therefore, INGOs face a dilemma when they achieve results that do not fit the format: either they follow their practical knowledge, or they follow their donor-approved plans.

Following their ‘feel for the game’ would mean prioritizing their assessment of what happened at the meeting and supporting participants in developing these. This option makes practitioner sense, as Elsa expresses when she says the meeting went ‘really well,’ but it also means they will have more work and potentially trouble in relation to their donor. The other option, of sticking to their plans, would mean they ignore such moments and close their ears to such understandings of progress. Instead, they could put their energy into persuading partners into developing a result from the planning protocol, what she jokingly calls a result “UN Women style.” Donor formats thus limit the listening of INGOs, forcing them to choose between actual progress (if in unplanned form) and the funding that pays for their work.

I have probed Elsa’s story because it shows that emotions such as pride provide an entrypoint to understanding what INGO practitioners want to do, how the ability to listen matters in their daily tasks, and what helps and hinders them from developing such skills. When INGOs facilitate, they listen intently. Facilitation requires skills to listen for potential openings even in banal conversation, as well as flexibility and a commitment to get to know the actors and their context. This is helped by a nuanced attitude to partners and time to invest in the process. Finally, Elsa’s story shows how donor formats can pressure INGOs to favor pre-conceived ideas and close their ears to progress in practice.

*B) Ex 2, Carrie: “this network, /.../ and that the local actors are determined to keep it going”*

“I would say the thing I feel most proud of for the project, is having set up this network, and that it has such an energy to it. And that the local actors are determined to keep it going, and we have identified it as something we would like to continue to support through other projects.”

Carrie describes the project she has been managing for four years and which is about to end as the funding period is over. She explains in detail why she is proud of the results:

“You see the local actors, in their working groups /.../ being excited about certain things [when brainstorming activities], and also having it not be only about the small amount of money that they’re going to receive. That it’s actually about collaboration and ‘oh we learned about advocacy in this training, so here’s our chance to apply it’ [when] talking amongst themselves /.../ like, actually thinking from a collaboratively point of view, rather than being sort of like ‘oh, [INGO] can fund this activity through the network, but I want to try and design it all for me.’ So, these sorts of moments had a lot of energy.”

Carrie’s pride in facilitating energetic collaboration between local peace actors illustrates that INGOs want to listen to their partners, and in fact do listen intently, even if there are limits. According to her story, the project has contributed to what many peacebuilding INGOs strive for: sustainable results, that is, results that last even after the project has ended, perhaps even after the INGO has left the area. In a funding environment where “donor-driven” development is common, seeing local actors taking initiatives in the project without getting funded is an important signal that there was “added value” from the INGO’s involvement. Carrie senses “energy” when local partners meet, assesses that these meetings are “actually about collaboration” rather than “about the small amount of funding,” and hears partners “talking amongst themselves” about what they “learned about advocacy in this training.” Her observations are all, in the terminology of results-based project management (RBM), “indicators” that the INGO has listened to understand what is valuable for local actors’ work rather than just sending money or trying to do peace for them. Her pride in the results thus reflects the contributions her INGO (in fact, all three INGOs in this study) want to make and think they should be making. This kind of tailor-made process requires listening for what results local actors can benefit from, beyond the funding.

The project design expresses the INGO’s strong wish to listen to their partners. Or as Carrie says, they were working through what she thinks is an “innovative methodology.” The design is unlike “most of the other projects and international NGOs” which “would have a



project designed that has certain goals and objectives, and then they would do a call for partners who respond to those /.../, not only in the approach, but also the topic.” She clarifies that instead of providing funding for a specific topic, such as “women’s literacy,” “water service,” or “community dialogues for peacebuilding,” this project was “about the *method* of *how* you support local peace actors /.../ in *their* work, to further *their* impact.” In other words, she explains, “we didn’t actually have topics of peacebuilding that we were pushing, but it was rather the process of supporting the actors.” That is, the INGO was open to supporting different ways of contributing to the peace processes, across sectors and levels.

Even the focus of the project’s three phases reveals thorough preparation by Carrie’s colleagues to really understand the context and listen to what civil society peace actors needed. These three phases were, simply put, capacity building of peace actors doing their own work, encouraging networking in the area regardless of thematic focus, and increasing integration of actors and processes across political levels. All three were motivated by the INGO’s understanding of the context. Foregoing a thematic focus (on women, water, etc.), they supported advocacy “because a lot of local peace actors don’t really know what advocacy is, in that it’s sort of confused with communication /.../ of results, [rather than] another step you can take that will actually increase the impact of your activities.” They supported networking (rather than giving a few groups larger grants) because they found civil society impact to be limited by local actors “all competing for funding from international NGOs” which meant that locals “haven’t really been able to see the value in collaboration.” And they supported work across political levels because they found that factors driving conflict were connected and thought those driving peace should be so too. In sum, the project design was based on an effort to understand the context the local peace actors were working in.

In addition to listening for what may benefit civil society and its contribution to peace processes, the INGO listened intently to find groups with the right approach towards peace work. To identify actors actually working for peace (even if doing so through themes such as “women’s rights” or “water service”), Carrie explains that her team tried to get to the logic behind the local actors’ work: “the key for us was that /.../ their work had to be understanding and addressing the underlying causes of conflicts. Otherwise you do see a lot of actors who act more sort of as community mediators /.../ rather than just connecting it to the bigger conflict /.../ linked to the war.” In a massive mapping exercise, they identified and evaluated many hundreds of peace actors, some of whom were invited into the network and a smaller number who got more substantial financial support. As a result the INGO ended up partnering with “peace actors [who] worked on very different topics: land conflicts, inter-community ethnic conflicts, mining conflicts between communities and mining companies /.../ electoral violence, everything.” They quickly learned that such an open listening process led to much more work than planned.

Just like in Elsa’s facilitation story, Carrie’s team realized early on that listening to a wide range of input demanded a lot of resources, particularly time. Carrie explains that already in the mapping before the project started, her team “had initially thought we would fund a certain number of peace actors [with]in a, like a two-month period, and instead, it took *eight months!*” After evaluating and selecting partners, the project started with capacity building of partners to help them develop their project plans and applications. Carrie exclaims: “a big lesson learned from our project is that it took *so much more* human effort, from our project team, *and* finance *and* admin and operations than anticipated, to actually get proposals of the quality we could approve. And then reporting of an acceptable quality.” I will get back to their work with making

proposals and reporting fit donor demands (in Examples 7-9 below), but here I want to note that listening openly to learn something new takes time throughout the project. Not only mapping but also capacity building requires more time the more open the process is, for example, to fit different kinds of partner organizations.

If Carrie's story, just like Elsa's, shows that INGOs do listen to partners, and that time helps them do so, another similarity is that both INGOs drew explicitly on their in-between status as being situated between partners and other internationals. When Carrie's INGO developed their understanding of the context partners were working in as well as of the partners themselves, they used their role as an international organization to both understand and influence the political context of this specific conflict. In particular, they were heavily involved in a UN-led process to develop an overarching policy framework for the region. Such frameworks usually aim to increase coordination of actors and across levels and sectors and to ensure sustained funding from international donors for such coordinated action. The idea is that impact for peace increases when many actors make efforts in the same direction. Carrie explains that they, "spent a lot of time in the first year and a half of the project really trying to push things /.../ [but] it just never went anywhere." Had it done so, their activities in this step may have gotten more leverage, but now, even though they "did send lots of actors to certain events /.../ and these sorts of things, /.../ there wasn't sort of a consistent theme across them." Being attuned to international (as well as local) actors in the conflict area is thus a way for the INGOs to shape their facilitation efforts even between different local actors. It helps INGOs prioritize what to suggest, push for, support, etc. However, in an open process, there is no right answer from the beginning. Instead, INGOs have to use their practical skills of navigating what is happening. This means listening to different actors involved and taking chances that in hindsight maybe "never went anywhere."

Thus, Carrie's facilitation story shows that INGOs do use their practical knowledge to listen to partners, consciously drawing on their in-between status to understand problems and possibilities in the context. In addition, the story underlines the importance of facilitating factors such as time, an open attitude to partners (who they are and what they want), and a flexible view on what are meaningful results. Without either of these, INGOs would not have the opportunity or the motivation to listen at all. However, looking closer at Carrie's story, some contradictions can also alert us to limitations which shape the listening of INGOs.

One such contradiction in Carrie's description relates to the "capacity contradiction" identified in Chapter 2. With this I mean the careful balancing INGOs do in attributing certain skills to partners (usually related to context and grassroots activities) while maintaining that they themselves can contribute others (usually related to method and professional techniques). Often, many of the resources for capacity building are then spent on strengthening the ability of local actors to work within the project logic used by institutional donors. For example, partners learn how to do a proposal for funding, use specific application and reporting formats such as log-frames, and understand technical terminology related to monitoring and evaluation. At first, Carrie's account of local actors' strengths and weaknesses seems to follow the standard script of the 'capacity contradiction.' She states that "What the local actors are really good at is *implementing and activity*. They're not good with the administration around it," thus motivating the added value and time/money spent by the INGO on improving partners' weaknesses.

However, as she goes on, Carrie describes how her team also spent a lot of time on capacity building on how to do activities. I quote her as she describes their efforts to provide:

"trainings on the actual peace, or conflict transformation tools. Because another mistaken assumption may be that local actors are actually using participatory approaches, and, and have goals to be representative of all aspects of society, and that is also not true. Just because they're local doesn't mean they know how to conduct an effective participatory

process. So we actually had to do a lot more training on conflict transformation tools that these actors could use, so that their activities were still acceptable to the sort of values of [INGO] in peacebuilding.”

In other words, despite being chosen in the comprehensive mapping process described above as “really good at” “implementing and activity,” local partners still needed “a lot more training” from the INGO to make their activities “acceptable” to the INGO’s peacebuilding “values” which include “effective participat[ion].” Noting this contradiction in Carrie’s story, thus complicates the picture of how INGO’s listen and support local partners. It shows that these practices are shaped by the donor environment as well as by the INGO’s own policies (peacebuilding values) and procedures (budget guidelines, mentioned above). At this closer inspection, even the results she is proud of are at the center of contradictory interpretations.

In fact, Carrie’s INGO can almost be said to operate with two versions of the story of the project and its results. In one version of the story, the project is designed on the basis of years of operating in the context, in cooperation with local partners, to benefit them as individual organizations and collectively, as well as the peace process(es) broadly. As noted above, there are plenty of signs that the local peace actors have benefited from the project and appreciate the networking structure and the capacity building. Such signs are that partners are holding extra meetings, working without money through certain periods, consciously applying lessons from trainings, etc. In addition, Carrie has observed concrete changes in micro-dynamics between actors. For example, the meetings have evolved from actors hesitating to even speak lest someone steal their ideas to more readily sharing thoughts and reframing initiatives as from the network, creating “energy” that may carry the cooperation forth beyond the project. All this suggests that the INGO team are indeed skilled listeners, who have succeeded in taking local input into account in setting up the project as well as in developing it along the way.

In the other version, the local peace actors involved do not seem to share Carrie's interpretations of the value of the project. The following quotes aim to illustrate how difficult it is for the INGOs to interpret results given the economic and other power dynamics in the situation. At first, when I ask what helped the INGO set up the project, she says, already somewhat contradictorily: "I guess the only enabling factor ... was that there... *there was interest from local actors* to work this way, *even though we had to convince them* that this made sense" (emphasis added). Explaining further, she says, "So, of course in the beginning, they would have all preferred to have received 200,000 dollars and funded their organization for three years, and done what they wanted, but once they realized, like, no matter how many times they asked us, that's not what was going to happen, ahm, then, they were interested in this." She acknowledges that it might have been a matter for the local partners of "accepting that it was that or nothing [laughs]." In the difficult economic situation, she is very conscious of partners' limited choice, pointing out that they almost all "work on voluntary basis and are scraping by, and when they get 5,000 dollars, they do a *lot* with that money". In fact, she states forcefully, "there's no way that local actors *wouldn't* participate, because they would *always* be *hopeful* that it would lead to something." This back-and-forth illustrates that when INGOs hear energetic participation, that may not be because partners approve of the project, but because they are economically desperate.

In addition to economic power inequalities shaping what INGOs may hear, how they take in criticism from partners may also be affected by their ultimate decision-making power over the project. After stating that partners for economic reasons may not outright reject the project, Carrie emphasizes that "they *will* be vocal with their critique [and] with what they might have preferred. So, you know, we had to go through a lot of that in the beginning." It sounds as if her INGO listened for criticism but heard that the partners changed their minds over time to be more

positive. This is underlined by her statement that “the methodology of our project was interesting, and it took a long time for the local peace actors to see that, but they did finally get it.”<sup>71</sup> However, during the present phase of wrapping up and reporting on the project, she acknowledges that “of course, when we did our final evaluation all that came up again.” She has noted partners’ criticism, but still insists on the value of the project design: “[to criticize] is totally fine, but you can’t have it both ways, you can’t have, you’re not gonna have have full partnerships with 160 actors.”

Summing it up, Carrie says “so this was the challenge for our project, getting the local actors to understand the logic of our project, and accept it, and see how they benefited from it, without them wishing that other things would have happened.” My analysis is that the long rack of contradictions and qualifications in her interpretations of the project indicate that the way INGOs listen to their partners is limited by several factors. These include donor frameworks and the INGOs’ own policies and procedures, as well as inequalities in economic and decision-making power between INGOs and their partners.

This subsection has probed Carrie’s account of the project to facilitate networking between locals and the results she is most proud of. It has shown that the INGO dared to take the risk they perceived in the “innovative methodology” they used to listen to local actors across themes and over the course of the project. However, this led to considerable costs in terms of time needed to adapt the project and work based on what the INGO heard. In addition to having an open attitude to who partners were and what they wanted to do, as well as the time required, a helping factor was their access to the local arena for the international actors. This international

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<sup>71</sup> Of course, any actor can take a long time to change their evaluation about something because of their socialization (as the Bourdieusian framework suggests). My point here is thus not that Carrie is necessarily wrong, but to problematize her power position in making these evaluations of partners’ criticism.

policy environment provided opportunities to link actors across levels, even though doing so, “didn’t really succeed as was hoped” when the process to develop an overarching framework “didn’t really gain the momentum” expected. While Carrie shared how the project has led to observable changes in more collaborative meetings, active engagement with training content, and ‘energy’ among local partners, contradictions in her story also reveal limitations that shape what INGOs can listen for. Donor demands and INGO frameworks, as well as organizational and geopolitical power inequalities between INGOs and partners, influence INGOs to fit what they hear into their existing understandings and make it more difficult to sustain receptivity to local actors’ interpretations and priorities.

C) *Ex 3, Sara: “There aren’t so many white people there, so”*

Sara draws a quick breath and exclaims “Yes!” as she recalls another situation of pride in her work in a conflict-affected region. She explains further why this situation felt special, and “inspiring.”<sup>72</sup>

- We had a meeting about women’s rights to own and use land. Participants were local leaders and land holders “who agreed to expand women’s rights then and there, at the meeting!” There were a lot of different actors there, local authorities, women’s activists from different “tribes.” It felt “historical,” like “a victory.”

Pernilla: For you too, even though you weren’t there as an activist?

- Well, I was there “*also* as an activist. I’m there *also* because I’m passionate about women’s situation there.” We have that “in common. [It’s] meaningful that we are there,” it shows “legitimacy and international support.” “It can help them.”

Pernilla: Even in [village]?

- “Yes, absolutely. There aren’t so many white people there, so if there’s a white person present from outside, the effect is that ‘oh, this is important’ [smiles a little, shrugs].”

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<sup>72</sup> Example 3 contains shorter verbatim quotes as I did not record this interview but took notes (due to technical difficulties).



Sara's story is another example that situations of pride can provide entrypoints into what practitioners want to do and think they should do. Sara thinks her INGO can play a "meaningful" role in facilitating local politics in a region of armed conflict. The meeting was held between politically, economically, and ethnically diverse stakeholders, about the sensitive issues of land rights. She explicitly references the advantages of the INGO's in-between status: on the one hand, she has "in common" with the local organizations that she is "also an activist." On the other hand, the fact that they "are there" not only as NGO representatives but as "internationals" can provide the activists with "legitimacy and international support."

At such meetings, Sara can choose between different practices to show "international support." That "internationals" usually are white and "locals" are not means that Sara's body can become a tool which signals this "legitimacy and international support" by being there, "present from outside." Reflecting on whiteness, Sara adds that "there are many connotations" but generally "white people have money and power." Therefore, when present, they become "a symbol for something being important." In addition to presenting her outside, white body, Sara uses other practices to "show support":

- I gave one of those introductory speeches [circling hands like a wheel to show getting things rolling]. We were "there as observers," "we saw what was happening," "we went around listening," and "we can act as mediators." "We had the *full* possibilities of speaking with *everybody*." As a women's activist you may not be able to speak with a land owner at the coffee machine, but we can do that.

Sara's examples show how INGOs listen when they facilitate between different local stakeholders. We recognize the mix of pausing and pushing from Elsa's story above. In the meeting, Sara seems to have practiced pausing when acting as an "observer," who "went around listening" and "saw what was happening." In other instances she seems to be pushing more, consciously. For example, she can use her particular position for "speaking with everybody" and

“act as mediator” between women’s activists and land owners who are unlikely to talk, even at the coffee machine. In practice, there are no clear rules to follow for when to push or pause but practitioners make constant decisions, drawing on their practical knowledge, their feeling for when either is appropriate.

While such practical knowledge is often non-verbal, developed from trying and interpreting the responses by other actors, Sara shows that taking this role is at least partly a conscious decision. When I ask how she gets that status to speak with “everybody,” if it is because she is white and a donor, she answers: “You *can* get it. Not everybody takes it.” She notes that perhaps not all donors do, depending on how they see their role. “I saw it more like we were there together.” The attitude of being “there together” with local activist partners helps her to take an actively supporting role.

When I ask for other conditions that help her, she emphasizes time (as in previous examples). The project had “a long process before the meeting” of “participatory action research.” Through that research, the local partners developed a context-specific analysis and “locally anchored” the project so that the “locally highest administrative manager” would be present at the meeting. They did this because “they knew” it would be “absolutely necessary” in order to achieve the coveted result: an agreement, in the form of a formal “Act of Engagement” between stakeholders. Such a formal agreement between local stakeholders is a perfect “result” to put into a donor matrix. It reminds us of Elsa’s joke in Example 1 that a prepared formal agreement would work as an ideal result “UN Women style.” The INGO can use the Act of Engagement in their donor report as the long project is now ending. However, Sara points out that the agreement is only one step toward rights becoming practical reality, and one that they would “like to build on [smiles wearily].” But, as the funding period is over, the project will end.

In sum, Sara's story of feeling pride reinforces my interpretation that INGO practitioners draw on their in-between status and listening skills to facilitate processes between different local stakeholders. (Such skills include how to approach land owners and activists to make either feel comfortable to talk at the coffee machine, taking seriously partners' assessment that the meeting requires the presence of the administrator, and the sensitivity to pick up how her white body can influence the meeting.) Whereas this story adds the role of the foreign (white) body as a tool for (some) INGO practitioners to use to signal the status associated with international actors, other conditions are the same as in previous examples: she highlights the practical skills to take the decisions about pushing and pausing in concrete instances, and the attitude toward partners which helps her to tune in. Once again, the importance of time is underlined, and how donor logic limits the aims. This may lead to projects ending with results practitioners consider a good starting point – even when those results fit perfectly into matrix thinking. In such cases any changes achieved are left as preliminary and at risk as activists have to prioritize other activities or themes, depending on funding trends.

*D) Pride (facilitation) section summary*

In this section I have analyzed three situations when practitioners expressed that they felt pride in their ordinary work. These moments have revealed that INGOs see facilitation between local actors as a practice they want to do and think they should do. Examples also show that when facilitating, INGOs (often consciously) draw on their in-between position and do listen. In doing so, they make use of their practical knowledge and feel for dynamics to support their partners in – what they think is – the best way in that situation. Probing these situations of pride have also revealed that listening is helped by an attitude toward their partners that is nuanced and as being “together” with them, as well as by having time throughout the project to listen and adapt activities. A closer look at contradictions in their accounts has shown how donor logic

works through formats and time frames to encourage INGOs to close their ears to input outside of these frameworks. In the following section I go through examples of translation, another task internationals want to do and think they should be doing which I have identified by following their expressions of “Yes!-moments” of achievements

## **2. Yes!-moments of achievement: translating between local partners and international decision-makers**

In this section I analyze three examples of practitioners’ daily activities connected with a distinct moment of achievement, what I have called a “Yes!-moment.” I call them this because even though interviewees did not make the gesture of clenching their fist high in the air and pulling their arm down, exclaiming “Yes!” – that is the feeling they express. The distinct moment, almost “punchline” to these stories, distinguishes them from the more general situations that generated pride in the previous examples. I also categorize them separately as they all indicate another type of practice that INGO practitioners want to do and think they should do: translating between their local partners and international decision-makers. With translation, I do not mean between different languages, as in Serbian and English for example. Instead, I mean that INGOs work to improve understanding between the different spheres of local partners on the one hand and of international decision-makers on the other. In these different spheres, different language practices dominate, for example formal vs. informal, and technical vs. general language, and INGOs aim to “translate” between them.

The examples show that in such translation, INGOs consciously draw on their experiences from fora of international politics as well as from civil society. They use their listening skills to relate to both spheres of actors and they constantly make decisions based on their practical feel for the dynamics in the particular policy arena – or even meeting room:

decisions to speak themselves or leave space for partners, which terminology to use, and whether to advise partners to adjust or keep their “own” language. While these are stories about “moments,” time for preparation and follow-up is a crucial condition, as is practitioners’ relationships with people. Relevant people are not only those working for partners or decision-makers, but also their own INGO colleagues and management. Finally, probing contradictions brings out limiting conditions which shape how practitioners can listen and take what they hear into account.

A) *Ex 4, Monica: “Nobody can say nothing after that!”*

Monica raises her raspy voice and laughs: “When *they* come in Brussels, with their stories... *Nobody* can say *nothing* after that!” She continues at her fast pace:

“you know, like, when they say [imitates tired activists speaking monotonously] ‘lately we had this child that came without the kidney, they actually took out the kidney of a child, boy of 12 years, girl of 13 /.../ they used them to steal their organs, and then [the children] were actually sexually abused’ /.../ [back to normal voice] And *then* you are talking about the ‘strategy not in place,’ ‘government that is not sensitive,’ ‘blablabla.’ After *this* story...”

Monica is telling me about a hearing in Brussels where EU officials assess whether Western Balkan EU-accession can move ahead. For eight years, she has been leading the INGO’s work with bringing Balkan peace activists to Brussels to give their view of the (often limited) state progress in areas like post-conflict trafficking, reconciliation, and sector reforms of education, police, etc. She tells me the story as an example of what motivates her, which includes the satisfaction she gets from bringing the contrasting worlds of activists and EU bureaucrats together. I interpret Monica’s “Yes!-moment” as forcing decision-makers at the structural level to consider the effects for people working at the grassroots level of “strategy not in place.” This

means a chance that they “after *this* story” are more prepared to take local partners’ expertise into account, something internationals are reputedly bad at, as described in Chapter 1.

In creating such moments, one could say that the INGO translates between local partners and international decision-makers. The satisfaction Monica expresses at this moment and the concerted long-term effort the INGO put into getting there indicate that this is something INGOs want to do. Just like when they facilitate between different local stakeholders, INGOs draw on their in-between status as part of both the international policy community and the activist civil society to help translate concerns and improve understanding between the two spheres.

Working in the fluid space in-between two different frames to Monica’s mind allows her to be creative and break the boundaries of what is expected in each sphere. She can thus:

“bring [] the things that *I* think it is important; the identities, the emotions, the structure, different structures, the discrimination, you know, all of the things, bringing in the same pot and somehow boil [chuckles] and seeing what really politics is about. And how that, again, implements on certain concrete processes, like enlargement.”

In other words, to translate to the point where business as usual stops (where “nobody can say nothing”) and new possibilities open up (“*then* you are talking about the ‘strategy not in place’”), INGOs are helped by taking risks of mixing unexpected elements.

Risk-taking requires listening carefully to both international decision-makers and local partners to combine their input so that each can recognize enough of themselves to understand the other better. For Monica, conditions that facilitate such listening includes preparation through networking and studying to know which EU meetings will be receptive for local partners’ input, which individuals are most relevant to make appear at those meetings, and which buzzwords are most likely to generate political (and monetary) support. It also means a huge effort to prepare local partners to deliver their message in the right mix of grassroots and professional, echoing the

authenticity contradiction in Chapter 2. To draw out the listening skills involved, I stay a bit longer with Monica's description of her role.

When I ask Monica what she does, she says:

“I coach them! /.../ I do coach partner organizations [in] how they push and say what. I do this in, let's say, conversation with them, discussing things, but then, timing... You know, I listen first [for] two days. I listen [to] them and write down everything that they raise as the issues, country issues.”

Preparing partners for sharing their stories in Brussels thus requires her to first listen intensely and “write down everything that they raise” for “two days.” Note that this is not because she will raise these issues herself. Instead, in the next step, she will link it to her understanding of what is necessary in Brussels:

“Then I formulate that [a] little bit, reformulate sometimes, sometimes I take some examples, and then I recommend them what would be nice, you know /.../ ‘if you formulate this way and you give this example,’ you know, help them, somehow to formulate their message.”

This way, Monica aims to support partners in speaking so the international decision-makers will hear them, will stop their usual routine and “say *nothing* after that. And *then*” to talk about what needs to be done at macro level again, (hopefully) based on a new understanding. The recommendations and reformulations that Monica suggests partners make, in turn come from careful listening to international decision-makers. She describes this part of her preparation:

“I actually try to be ... well-informed, read certain documents, and relate to /.../ action plan, to country strategies, and the latest country reports. I do analyze them, and then with all of this, I try to formulate three messages that [partners] could easily fit to these three things /.../ because then /.../ I can say ‘yes in your /.../ action plan too, you have this goal, and in this goal you have this under indicators, that you could measure, and under this indicator...’”

Through her preparation to understand what EU officials prioritize, Monica can thus play what she thinks “is also my role somehow, our role, [INGO]: to really give the back-up to

[partners], all the time giving them back-up, back-up, back-up.” Partners need back-up because “they are afraid that what they say, it’s not...meaningful at all, or it’s not important to anyone,” they are also “afraid that they don’t know good English” and that “this is too far away from them.” Monica explicitly thinks this is where partnership matters, because, as she says “I know about their program, I know about what they do in their everyday work.” She thus consciously uses the INGO’s in-between status to translate concerns between partners and decision-makers.

In doing so, Monica uses her practical knowledge to handle the contradictions involved. In Monica’s story, this particularly concerns how partners should tell their stories in the Brussels meetings. On the one hand, the whole point seems to be that they tell “*their* stories,” to “talk their *own* language and talk about things *they* want to talk about.” This is because, as Monica tells them, “what they do and what they know, nobody knows there [in Brussels].” On the other hand, the training is not only about confidence building, but how to “somehow formulate their message,” which means to “reformulate sometimes” and “recommend them what would be nice.” In her work, Monica thus develops a feel for the game, for when partners should tell their stories their way and when they should revise them.

In this concrete coaching of local partners to shape their narratives to achieve the dramatic effect of decision-makers saying “*nothing*” to “*then /.../* talk about strategy not in place,” Monica uses both informal and formal tools and skills. The purpose is to make partners “*secure* in their formulations,” both in using English and (the right amount of) EU/policy terminology. Informal skills include humor and personal examples. For example, when Monica tries to alleviate partners’ fears about using broken English, she jokes with them that native Spanish speakers – not just her relatives, but even professionals – might say they like something “*bery, bery much.*”



Examples of formal tools include an EU manual “where they say how you should formulate your language, or /.../ European Union language or high politics language.” In addition, there are the ubiquitous buzzwords that reflect present policy trends. Monica mentions “CVE” or “Countering Violent Extremism” as an “issue[] in fashion,” where she will “find a few examples from each [partner] country” to illustrate how partners can translate local phenomena into abstract “high politics language.” Partners do not only get “back-up” from Monica in telling their stories, but also in how to answer EU officials when they do not know, such as using “this famous sentence [joking voice]: ‘let me find out and get back to you.’” Thus, both formal and informal tools and skills help INGOs to translate their partners’ concerns to international decision-makers. To change what decision-makers hear, INGOs help partners balance “European Union language” with the lived experience that “nobody knows” in partners’ “*own* stories.” Several conditions help Monica in such translation.

The first condition that helps Monica is frequent contact with partners: “you need to be present. You need to...really be present with them. You need to ask them /.../ ‘how are you,’ ‘how it’s going,’ very often.” Such frequent contact updates Monica on what partners are doing, alerts her to results that they may not think to put into the written reports, and shows she cares about them. (In Chapter 2, practitioners also emphasized contact and care as aspects of good partnership.) For example, she happened to text a partner representative just as this person was taking a selfie with visiting EU parliamentarians whom they had met in Brussels. The photo was immediately useful in the INGO’s external communication (to show that INGO work creates results), and Monica “tr[ies] to keep it for annual reporting.” The second helpful condition, to Monica, is “[m]y own curiosity” as well as “management [and] good colleagues who also want to improve themselves, who /.../ want to learn and bring their things.” Third, Monica brings up

the – seemingly inevitable – condition of money: “It helps me to know [donor] support us for four years, hey, it helps me a lot! [laughing] /.../ I need a long-time financial support to have results in advocacy.” The money enables a long-term perspective on desirable results and a qualitative process toward them.

In sum, Monica’s story of a satisfying “Yes!-moment” illustrates that INGOs do listen and draw on their in-between position when they translate between their local partners and international decision-makers. Helpful conditions are personal and organizational resources like curiosity, management and colleagues’ attitudes, as well as their relationship to the donor and the funds these donors provide. However, probing the contradictions involved in coaching partners to both tell their own, unique stories *and* adjust these stories to fit high-level policy arenas not only reveals INGOs’ listening skills. It also indicates that INGOs do not have a completely open agenda when they listen for what partners do and want. Instead, there is a framework influencing what they listen for, and this framework is partly set by the agendas and buzzwords already in place in the international arenas.

*B) Ex 5, Pernilla: “participation is the security priority”*

A second example is shorter and from my own work in Kosovo, where I happened to play a translator role over a lunch sandwich. This happened in the period 2004-2006, when Kosovo was under the transitional administration of the UN. A friend of mine at the UN was involved in getting the treasured “local input” to the security sector reform by setting up a series of participatory stakeholder meetings. She asked me to explain to her boss why women organizations should be given a seat in the exclusive committee drawing conclusions from the consultations. He was sympathetic to gender issues, but reluctant to expand the committee, something our partner organizations had been campaigning for but not yet been successful in bringing about. After about three of my long-winded attempts to persuade him by explaining

feminist work on marginalization and security, describing the local women's movement's credentials on the issue, and quoting the relevant UN Security Council resolution 1325 (requiring women's participation in post-conflict processes), he asked again.

He could not understand why local women activists could not just formulate a list of security demands for the committee, prioritizing "what women want." Exasperated by my inability to convey a key priority of our partner (and the INGO I worked for), I tried to highlight the difference between handing over a list of priorities and being present in the process where such priorities were negotiated. Finally, I burst out something like "to them, participation *is* the security priority." Something clicked, and a seat was granted. For the boss, coming for a sandwich with a junior international a colleague vouched for was a low-stakes exercise where the alternative would have been sitting down with a local activist. Any meetings with local actors are usually more sensitive to criticism for why this one and not others, there are more protocols to follow, and they have to fit into a formal process. However, meeting with an INGO worker like me did not require these extra measures while still giving him (indirect) access to "local knowledge." Because he cared to understand something that was important to his colleague (and perhaps to tick a box of "gender mainstreaming the peace process") he gave me chance after chance to explain differently. Therefore, my in-between role as another international closer to (some) local actors allowed me to translate a certain demand that he could understand differently and therefore be motivated to change. Obviously, my colleagues and I were very satisfied with achieving this concrete result of our international advocacy.

As in Monica's story above, relationships were key, here not only with local partners and seeing ourselves as "together" with local partners (as in Sara's story in example 3), but also with other internationals as colleagues in this particular endeavor. I had listened to our partners

enough to know this was a key priority for them, and I definitively listened intently during the lunch to his questions and objections to find an argument that would convince him.

However, there were also limits to my listening and what I could do with the result, both during the lunch meeting and in its aftermath. To start with, getting a seat on the committee was only a concrete but small part of the demands that our partner organizations had on internationals' involvement in the post-conflict development, but I did not try to convey any of the broader concerns. My sense (right or wrong, I will never know) was that doing so would have taken too long and risked closing his ears completely as unreasonable or unactionable complaints. After the meeting, our hesitation to talk about it also meant lost opportunities for feedback, and adjustment, as with the power taboos described in Chapter 2.

In fact, despite the feeling of achievement (or of getting lucky) in using our in-between status to push for greater inclusion of our local partners within an international system, we never told our local partners and did not feel confident to use it in our results reports to donors. In relation to local partners, we felt that we should not be taking credit as they themselves had advocated strongly to be included in the formal process (and I still feel unsure of what the causal impact was). In relation to donors, the lunch was not part of a competently executed advocacy campaign for a process included in our application, and so it was not specifically in our "matrix." Perhaps mentioning this result would not impress them with our flexibility and networking, but rather raise questions about how we prioritized, or about the appropriateness of informal talks. Even worse, perhaps they would take it as a license to disregard our local partner's hard work on the issue. Even a clearly satisfying Yes!-moment can thus be an ambivalent victory and show listening as well as limits and taboos that shape what can be heard and learnt going forward.

C) *Ex 6, Elsa: “she was perfect!”*

A third translation example is from another activist visit to Brussels. Elsa, my interviewee, describes a meeting with a member government’s representation at the EU: “We were [there] for lunch, and we had planned to have two [activists] who started talking a bit, and we said we thought it was [Elham’s] turn. Because she hadn’t done it so far. And it turned out she was *perfect!*”

What was “*perfect!*” about Elham’s (the activist) story, was that it integrated her personal life story with the advocacy message at structural level. The purpose of this visit was not related to a specific proposal, but to influence the EU and its member governments more broadly to counteract what is called the shrinking space for civil society. The concept “shrinking space” describes the political development that many governments, both in more democratic and more authoritarian countries, are making it more difficult for people to organize (Claesen and de Lange 2016; Hayes et al. 2017; Puddington 2017). Arrests and executions can be included, but as they are likely to draw international criticism, government measures for shrinking space usually take less spectacular forms. These can include complicated and expensive registration procedures for citizen groups, excessive tax laws and audit demands, and stricter travel restrictions. Advocacy strategies of INGOs against shrinking space often aim to bring the concrete consequences for individual activists and organizations of such strategies and legal measures to international decision-makers’ attention, to motivate the latter to act for change.

Elsa continues recounting Elham’s story of being a young Palestinian woman wanting to get politically involved in an environment of shrinking space:

“She just said, you know, ‘I’ll just tell my own story: Always, since I was young /.../ I’ve wanted to be active, politically active, /.../ and I tried, but the political parties don’t give you any chance, I was both young and a woman, and I thought ‘what to do, I want to be politically active,’ and then I found civil society.”

Elsa comments: “And we had also been talking about ‘gender aspects of shrinking space’ and one of them is that the consequences are worse for women, and I think we had kind of *given* it to them, so [after Elham’s story] I was just like ‘Yep – there’s the story to prove it!’”

Just like in Monica’s example above, Elsa’s story shows that INGOs work to translate local partners’ experiences and expertise to international decision-makers by providing local partners with terminology, frameworks, and buzzwords that work like hooks to draw internationals in and situate the concrete local experiences in the abstract world of policy. It aims to help decision-makers understand how the policies they make (or could make) are relevant (or not) in local actors’ everyday life and work. Probing Elsa’s story also illuminates more of the stakes involved in supporting partners to speak, rather than just say things oneself (like I did in Example 5) as an international.

Both the INGO and the partner organizations take risks in meetings such as that at the embassy. Describing the moment when they invited Elham to speak because “it was her turn,” Elsa expresses that she experienced a brief moment of nervousness: “Well, she just started like ‘I’ll tell my story’ and at first, you just felt this...[scrunches face a little]. Because many [people from that region] are really good at ...” P: Talking a lot about themselves? E: “No, you know, like [imitates start of sad story]. And then nobody listens – it’s *true*, but nobody’s listening.” So, inviting (or pushing) partners to speak in high level meetings can be risky if those partners do not perform properly, if their story is too sad to be appropriate, for example, “nobody listens” and it may get harder to access these platforms in the future.

In reverse, if partners perform well, this can bring benefits to both the INGO and its partner organizations (now and in the future). This is “*incredibly clear*” according to Elsa by how they were invited by a particular EU Committee, “into one of their regular meetings, which

is very rare. And the chairperson said, ‘now we will hear from [INGO] and their partners, and it is always valuable when they come to Brussels, you always learn so much from their partners.’” Such an introduction is likely to make committee members pay more attention to what is said, increasing the likelihood of partners’ message being heard, almost like a self-reinforcing dynamic. Thus, there are risks and opportunities involved in these performances, including the possibilities of speaking with decision-makers at all in the future.

The stakes involved motivate thorough preparation, just as we saw in Monica’s example, such as coaching partners in telling their story the right way to get decision-makers to listen. But this is not always as simple as ‘giving’ partners the international buzzword of the day, whether it is “shrinking space” or “CVE,” sometimes partners resist adapting their story. Elsa recalls a training in storytelling where a lot of participants “got really *pissed off*” having to imagine an audience that was skeptical of their cause. Several participants even changed the instructions so that their audience “was nicer.” Elsa smiles wryly and said that when she questioned “how many of those [nicer decision-makers] have you met?” some participants acknowledged that it is rare, but others protested: “this is manipulation, we are just saying what we are saying” to which she responded, “but do you want them to *hear* you?” This reminds us that INGO translation is taking place in a hierarchical context where one side has more leeway to ignore the other, who has to work harder to adapt, sometimes even to the point of feeling that “preparation” is actually “manipulation” of their actual experiences and expertise. Just like Monica’s example, Elsa’s story shows that INGOs constantly take decisions about when and how to support partners to tell their own story vs. when and how to adapt.

And just like in my Example 5 above, Elsa’s story also brings out the dilemma of deciding how to share the attention of decision-makers with partners. On the one hand, as

described above, the INGO trains and coaches partners, puts together meetings, links what they say to policy buzzwords, etc. On the other hand, Elsa emphasizes that it is important that “you always lift [partners]” up onto the stage at meetings like this. INGO staff should “pull it together, push it, remind about certain things, but, the ones who are talking are our partners. /.../ We don’t start speaking and especially not to start speaking to give a lot of our own thoughts and ideas.” This again underlines skills (and attitudes) necessary to balance INGOs’ in-between situation: on the one hand they are international actors supporting local partners to increase partners’ influence on international institutions.

On the other hand, they are themselves civil society actors who need to be seen as active and adding value, to motivate their own political role and funding. Elsa expresses that this is something that is “difficult” about partnership, “because sometimes we can shine, like, get to shine, because we have all the partners and can highlight their common...and then we become visible. But sometimes we actually have to take the backseat [and] really push for their voices to be heard /.../ to live by what we say we work for.” One way of handling this self-regulation is to differentiate between channels and occasions. Meetings such as the one described are “quite short” so there, INGOs should “take the backseat,” but when there are longer meetings “we can talk” because “they need breaks sometimes.” Also, the INGO usually “go more often” and can “send papers” between meetings. INGOs thus listen for the content in partners’ and decision-makers’ respective priorities, as well as for how to balance putting themselves or partners forward in international settings.

#### *D) Yes!-moments (translation) section summary*

This section has analyzed three examples in which INGO practitioners experienced a satisfying Yes!-moment of achievement, as they worked to translate partners’ concerns to international decision-makers to make these more likely to be heard. These stories reveal that



translation requires practical skill, including attentive listening to both types of actors. Further, translation improves when personal and organizational approaches prioritize learning and reflecting together, creativity and risk-taking, as well as relationship building. As in the previous subsection, time and money are helpful conditions which, in turn, are shaped by donor frameworks and the need of INGOs to appear competent within these. In these examples, the international policy framework also appears as a contradictory factor. Despite the overall emphasis on local ownership (described in Chapter 1), this framework concretely rewards partner stories that match the buzzwords “in fashion.” Frameworks for policy and funding are often related, and the following and third subsection gives examples of how INGOs feel responsible to link their partners directly with international (institutional) donors.

### **3. Responsibility: linking local partners with international donors**

This third subsection is based on practitioners’ feelings of responsibility. I struggled to identify a common emotion in these examples that I felt belonged together, because it is not as obvious as in the two previous subsections. In those examples, positive emotions were often expressed clearly, both physically and verbally: my interviewees raised the volume and pitch of their voices, often speaking faster and with a discernible punchline connected to a specific moment. In some cases they laughed and/or named the emotion as the quotes showed. The examples below however, were rather part of low-key descriptions of unremarkable days. Interviewees listed tasks matter-of-factly, sometimes with sighs and interjections like “you know, stuff like that.” This work is not exhilarating, but often slow, tedious, and without observable signs of success or even progress. Despite their “ordinariness,” I analyze these examples as positive experiences of emotion as I found interviewees expressing both concern (or care) and conviction (or even duty). While I considered these other options, I settled for

responsibility because it seemed to encompass both aspects. Specifically, practitioners expressed concern for long-term relations between their local partners and their international donors, as well as a conviction that they are uniquely placed to bring these actors together – and therefore feel a responsibility to do so.

In the examples below, I identify practices that INGOs use to link local partners and international donors with the aim to improve mutual understanding, to strengthen their long-term relations, and indirectly, to secure funding for local partners. I suggest that INGOs link partners and donors in three ways: by making local partners more like international donors (Example 7); by exposing donors to more of local partners' contexts (Example 8); and by buffering between partners and donors when they seem too far apart to link directly (Example 9). Unlike previous examples which all had one main story, the examples below merge different interviews (some used above, some new) to illustrate these three ways of linking.

A) *Ex 7: Making local partners more like international donors: “[E]verything got revised like maybe eight times or something”*

Carrie laughs a lot in our conversation, especially when she is describing how different expectations of her and her team were often thwarted as they got into the project. She tells me that while they were expecting to spend some time helping local partners to improve their applications in order to clarify the project logic, aims and activities, they were not fully prepared for how long this would take:

“Inevitably, in most of the cases, especially in the first round of funding, everything got revised like maybe *eight* times or something [laughing]. And that was without us being particularly picky, or perfectionist. It was really just about making sure that things were participatory and outlined in a logical way [tone of voice as stating obvious things], and that the budget respects [INGO requirements]. Cause we also have very standardized funding for things like per diems or transport /.../ so all the local actors had to follow these.”

In this phase of the project, Carrie’s INGO worked to give “small grants to selected [local] peace actors, for what we call a key activity, that was meant to advance their work or further it to the next step.” Giving funds is a core, or anchoring practice<sup>73</sup> for INGOs, meaning that a lot of other practices are made possible by this. For example, as we saw in Chapter 2, much of the capacity building that INGOs provide for local partners is oriented around writing applications and reports, articulating goals, monitoring results, etc. This is exactly what Carrie’s story is about. When the prospective partners hand in applications for funding that can “advance their work,” the capacity building Carrie and her team provides to partners – even before they are formally so – begins. By introducing, explaining, and increasingly demanding international aid standards for project management and reporting, INGOs take the first steps to link local peace actors to the – often quite overwhelmingly bureaucratic – world of international donor funding. Usually, the goal is that over time, the local partners will be able to apply for, manage and report such funds, and thus become “self-sustainable” organizations, with their own relationship to donor institutions. By merging practices of funding with capacity building which teaches local partners to be more like the international donors, that is, to use donor terminology, models, systems, and logic, the INGO thus links and enables a better understanding between them.

These linking practices around funding and capacity building require listening and other practical knowledge from practitioners. For example, there is no manual with the right answer to how many rounds of revisions Carrie and her team should have planned for - or how many extra rounds they should allow (or demand) when they assess their plan is not helpful. Instead, the team had to listen to each partner to understand as much as possible, both about what they want

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<sup>73</sup> Drawing on Ann Swidler, Adler and Pouliot explain anchoring practices as practices which “symbolically establish the constitutive rules they embody” (2011b, 23). I follow Sending and Neuman who (in the same volume) broaden the concept to also include practices which “mak[e] other practices possible” (2011, 234).

to do (what are the “key activities” that will “advance their work”) and how they work as a group (how do they already plan, implement, and follow-up). By matching this with what they hear from the donor side about absolute and negotiable demands, they tailor their capacity building to help the partner take as large steps as possible towards expressing what they do in donor language and models, for each round of revision.

In practice, this practical assessment usually involves very intensive contact. Depending on the security situation and infrastructure, some team members will be “in the field” in meetings with the partners, discussing the application, asking questions, and explaining demands. In those meetings, they constantly have to decide their next move, balancing the (sometime very) long-term goal of helping partner organizations to become more like international donors and the immediate goal of understanding and supporting what these groups want to and can do the coming months. Again, as in the other tasks of facilitation and translation, we see the decisions to push or pause that demand listening and a practical feel for the situation.

In a perhaps quirky twist, INGOs also listen for how their partners are listening. With this, I mean that local partners also try to understand INGOs’ priorities and terminology so that they can describe and perhaps adapt their project to access funding (as INGOs do with their donors). Therefore, even though INGOs *want* partners to adapt both their language, models, and actual project, they also listen for the possibility that the local actor is changing too much, as this could be a sign not of learning but of other things. For example, too much change could indicate that the local actor is not very serious but says anything to get funding. Or, the local actor may be trying to adapt to donor models they have encountered previously, models that are counter-productive to INGO goals.

For example, as Carrie explained earlier (Example 3) donors often have a set agenda and fund actions under certain themes, rather than the openness of funding local actors' "own" projects, as she put it. If local actors have had experience with set funding, they may try to figure out which themes the INGO prioritizes and how to best fit their work into that framing. Therefore, an INGO that wants to fund what local actors themselves want to do, as in Carrie's example, must listen for how partners are listening and encourage them to express their "own" agenda. To support local actors to keep their "own" direction *and* become more like international donors, INGOs thus have to develop their listening in practice.

A particular area of focus for making partners more like donors is their financial systems and routines. Adapting these towards international auditing standards is seen as a vital step towards the goal of partners being capable of receiving funding directly from international donors. One interviewee, Caitlin, explains how she and her colleagues do this by commenting extensively on partners' financial reports. To her, it means that "they have to be better with us because of the system" and it "strengthens their capacity." Even though Caitlin admits this work makes partners think "we're a pain in the ass," it is worth it, because in the end "it strengthens the organization and helps them get access to other [donors]." In other words, the INGO knows better than the partner – a contradiction I will get back to below. However, the feeling of responsibility to do a job despite becoming a "pain in the ass" is motivated by the conviction that it will be good for the partner in the long run.

All three INGOs in my study share this conviction and spend a lot of resources on financial capacity building. Sometimes it takes the form of formal trainings, but much is done in conversations with the partner, around their particular challenges. Another interviewee, John, expresses the same commitment as Caitlin when he contrasts another INGO's practice of sending

money to local partners with fewer controls, with his INGO where the finance department has just spent lots of time “actually sitting with our partners and their financial reporting.” Shaking his head, he says about partners “I think they appreciate that, really.” Financial routines and systems are central to linking practices that aim to make partners more like donors as they are seen as minimum requirements that indicate organizational capacity.

However, as we saw in Chapter 2 (and as much research shows), international NGOs and donors do not settle for improving financial routines. The organizational transformation of partners towards professional organizations (from informal grassroots groups) needed to secure their place in the “chain” linking them to donors (if, for now, through the cont(r)act with the INGO) is much more extensive. All three INGOs in my study use comprehensive organizational assessment tools where areas for development are identified (often together with partners), and can include things like employment procedures, recruitment routines, annual planning cycles, and delegation schemes in addition to financial systems.

The most obvious resource that interviewees almost always bring up first as helping them in shouldering this responsibility is staff (INGO colleagues). They need staff who have time to be with partners, working through the “*eight* revisions” Carrie laughed about. The need for staff is repeated in different ways by almost every person I speak with at the INGOs when I ask what helps them. Renate, another interviewee draws a breath, pauses for effect, and whispers dramatically “*Money!*” After a small laugh, she clears her throat and continues:

“well, yes, money [pause, small laugh again]. Money because it gives the resources for enough ‘feet on the ground’ to /.../ sit there and grind the reports /.../ Let’s say we wouldn’t have anyone *in* [conflict region], then there wouldn’t be anyone to sit there in a room, drink coffee and go through a financial report. [So,] money that covers staff who *can* work close [to partners].”

To be able to listen, people must meet, be in contact, sit together, seems to be Renate's message. And for INGOs, this takes money. But money for staff to be with partners is not the only facilitating factor mentioned. For example, several internal organizational factors are brought up. Just like Monica (Example 4) emphasized her need for colleagues who also strive to learn and a management which supports this, Renate adds that the organization needs time set aside for reflection among colleagues – as well as “a management which encourages this kind of discussion.” Along the same lines, John mentions “an open leadership” at the organization as helpful for improving partnership in general. Internal and external factors are thus connected.

The connection between internal and external factors is brought out by further by Manali's recruitment example. Manali is often involved in recruiting staff and emphasizes that while this may seem to be only an administrative routine, it is concretely connected to what kind of partner the INGO wants to be to the local actors they cooperate with: “It sounds simple, but it is connected with large organizational issues.” The reason is that the people recruited will practically implement whatever partnership policy is adopted. She clarifies that it is especially important to vet people “sent out” (to field offices) as “we are supposed to be good role models for how we view partnership.” When recruiting local staff Manali looks particularly at “whether they have worked with civil society support and what kind – only regranting, or also capacity building?” The different approaches are distinct, “if you have worked for USAID for example, that's completely different as they have implementing partners,” whereas INGO staff must be able to handle the “problematic [role] of being both donor and an equal partner.” Internal human resource routines thus influence partnerships.

In addition, Carrie brings up two aspects related to the external environment, that will both be discussed in relation to Example 8 below: the international policy environment and the

involvement of the INGO's own donor. Carrie describes the policy environment at the time the project was conceived as characterized by "a general trend amongst international NGOs" to be concerned about "how do we better support local actors." As another enabling factor, Carrie also adds that "the donor was very involved in designing this project – in a good way." These aspects of the environment and the INGO's donor relations influence how narrow or broad their frameworks are, through which they listen to partners. Through these contacts with other international actors, INGOs can develop their feel for when to push partners harder to adapt and when to let partners take longer or keep their own way of working while still being recognizable enough to the donors at the other end of the chain.

To fulfil their sense of responsibility for linking partners with donors and (to that end) helping partners to become more like donors in terminology, models, and organization of their work, INGOs thus develop listening and other practical skills. Listening is facilitated by money for staff as well as factors in the internal organization and the external environment. The contradictions in their accounts, which can indicate obstacles and limits to how they listen are, by now, recognizable from previous sections.

First, there is the "push and pause" contradiction, which may in this section be called "conviction and care." On the one hand, INGOs express conviction that partners will (eventually) benefit from INGOs being "a pain in the ass" who demand partners adapt almost every detail of how they organize. On the other hand, they simultaneously express care to support partners' "own" agenda, even trying to recruit people with experience of shouldering the role of equal partnership rather than simply handling "implementing partners." Second, while money has been emphasized as a key facilitating factor in the previous sections, these examples have more clearly brought out the need INGOs' own donor role creates to listen for how partners



listen. This attention to financially driven power dynamics becomes necessary if INGOs are to support partners' actual agenda, rather than partners' ideas of INGO priorities.

The stories grouped under Example 7 thus show that INGOs feel a responsibility to link partners to international donors in the long term by helping partners to become more like these donors in terms of terminology, models, and logic. To do so, INGOs use their in-between status as well as their listening skills. They listen to local partners describe what they want to do, and how they want to be organized, and little by little encourage, train, and perhaps even pressure partners to adapt to the demands and priorities that INGOs have heard from donors. The key resource in this task is money to buy time in the form of staff who can go "to the field" and "have coffee and go through the financial report" and to work with their activity plan, even if it takes revising it "*eight* times."

In addition, internal helping factors include recruiting staff and having colleagues that are oriented towards listening (rather than directing) as well as an "open" management who carves out time for staff to "reflect together." (External factors are addressed further below.) However, in these examples of linking practices, we see again the "push and pause" contradiction expressed as simultaneous "conviction and care" to support partners to develop in opposite directions, as well as the financially driven power dynamics. Both of these dynamics can place obstacles in the way of an open, non-determined listening to partners' own agendas and ways of working. While the interventions are often couched as helping partners with the supposedly neutral "methods" for how they work, this terminology obscures both the times adaptation is actually about content and values (changing who is included in peacebuilding processes, for example), and how methods themselves direct attention to certain issues and away from others.

However, in their daily work to fulfill their responsibility of linking partners to donors, INGOs not only try to change the local partner, but also work to influence the other side of the chain. Therefore, in the following subsection of Example 8, I show how INGOs work to pull donors closer to local partners by exposing them to more of partners' contexts.

B) *Ex 8: Exposing donors to more of partners' contexts: "[W]e have taken it upon ourselves to make sure that they get out there"*

Another example illustrates how INGOs work to strengthen the link between partners and donors by tightening the connection to the donor and exposing them to more of partners' contexts. When I ask one interviewee, Manali, what makes for a good donor, she explains:

"it's fantastic when the donor can be located *out there* [in the conflict affected country], understand the context. /.../ But the question is always how much they leave the capitals, how much they get out. There, we have *taken it upon ourselves to make sure* that they get out there. That is, we let them go with us, to the backcountry in [country]. And that's been really appreciated by [donor]. Because they don't go on their own."

Bringing donor representatives along when they go to "the backcountry" is a way for the INGO to help the donor "understand the context," by getting more exposure to the contexts that partners face. Despite all the reports and applications that INGOs must write to donors, and which all contain context analysis, activity descriptions, and results achieved, there seems to be something about the practical feel for the context that is hard to replace. When encountering difficulties and surprises in such conflict-torn and often poor circumstances INGOs and their partners benefit from the flexibility that they attribute to donors located "*out there.*" While Manali is referring to a specific donor they already have an agreement with, INGOs also try to pull the donor end of the chain between donors-INGOs-partners by addressing the donor community at large.

Exposing the donor community at large to partners' contexts can be done through different practices, such as participating in panels and other events where peacebuilding (or aid) is discussed, publishing recommendations based on partners' experiences, or advocacy and awareness raising to politicians – or even to the general public – in order to influence the political actors or trends that then influence donor priorities. One interviewee, Vanya, is based in the INGO head office and works on trainings as part of peacebuilding interventions, but also participates extensively in events by “external audiences, which can be either governments, donor organizations /.../ universities, academic institutions in general [and] UN agencies.” When I ask if “good partnership” means anything in that part of her work, she answers that “[w]ell, I use any opportunity to, to make links and to connect people. So, when I was in [panel], I met several people that I [connected] with our [country] programs and now they're doing something together.” After additional examples, she explains that she does this “because this is what I think peacebuilding is about: creating links and opportunities for people to learn from each other, to work together, and to support each other.”

While Vanya often travels to panels and similar events in Western countries, another interviewee, Catherine, describes how this can be done in the intervention country and together with a donor, to influence other donors working in the area. She recalls a particular project where the donor was “very engaged”, and they did “many joint actions.” For example, when the INGO had published an analysis as part of the project, they did a joint launch, a press release, “everything, every time we were in [capital] with a partner they would say ‘let's do a brown bag lunch.’” This quote also shows that bringing, suggesting, or inviting partners who can participate in events, etc. is another practice INGOs use to expose donors to more of partners' contexts. In addition to events, all three INGOs in my study publish reports and analyses to articulate

learnings and spread recommendations to the wider donor (and policy) community. Another interviewee, Elsa, emphasizes the power of the written word in pointing out that one ‘good example’ from their work gets used a lot “because it’s written down.” All these practices, such as participating in and organizing events, suggesting partner representatives, and publishing reports and recommendations, are examples of how INGOs work to influence donors, in particular and in general, by exposing them to more of partners’ contexts. The more donors’ understandings resemble those of partners, the more likely it is that INGOs eventually will be able to link them.

In order to present partners’ contexts so that donors can hear them with a mind open for new understandings, INGOs must listen for donor priorities. Just like the previous section showed that INGOs listen for policy buzzwords to coach partners in presenting their story for decision-makers, INGOs must know overall donor trends as well as local donor concerns in order to help donors connect to partners’ contexts. It is helpful to INGOs if they have a relationship with the donor beyond the formal agreement, preferably with a sense of joint purpose that motivates “joint actions” and flexibility from donors.

Manali illustrates the importance of relationships by comparing two different donor institutions. With one of them, she says, “it’s like ‘in with the concept note,<sup>74</sup> then if you’re lucky you get to write a full application, and [if you’re funded] then *that’s* what you do goddamn it, nothing else, you can’t change partners, you can’t change anything.” She contrasts this strict approach with that of another donor with whom the relationship has, “another tone /.../ you feel that ‘we’re working together’ for a common result we’re trying to achieve.” In Manali’s experience, a sense of joint purpose affects the project materially as the donor has “a completely

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<sup>74</sup> Institutional donors often use a two-step procedure for grant application where the first step is a shorter concept note and those who present an interesting idea get invited to hand in a longer, more detailed application. The purpose is to save time for both grantees and the granting institution.

different kind of flexibility and an understanding if you need to change partners half-way through.” Pulling donors closer by exposing them to partners’ contexts and strengthening relationships are thus important ways for INGOs of tying donors into the chain connecting donors-to-INGOs-to-partners.

Pulling donors closer to the INGO by developing a relationship that gives INGOs more flexibility is not automatically good for a particular partner but it increases INGOs possibilities to listen openly. Manali’s example shows that when INGOs can pay attention to what is actually happening in the project, it may mean some partners get “change[d] half-way through.” A more vocal and demanding partner could thus be changed more easily. However, the opposite situation where INGOs must follow their plan to the letter and “can’t change anything” certainly places limits on their listening as it demands more focus on implementing whatever activities were foreseen in the application to the donor, rather than learning and adapting along the way. The central role of the relationship is also highlighted by INGO stories of times when that relationship is ruptured or perceived as changing for the worse.

Several interviewees mention their shock<sup>75</sup> at abrupt changes when donors suddenly express they only care about the formalities of the contract rather than valuing a long-term relationship as before. For example, Marcos tells me he is “having a horrible experience with [donor] in a number of countries now.” To illustrate his “horrible experience,” he explains that his team “used the word partnership and we’ve been told ‘Wait a minute – this is not a partnership. You present a proposal – we like it, we fund it, we don’t...goodbye!’” The donor’s outright rejection of the word “partnership” threatens the INGOs’ long term possibilities of tying the donor into the imagined chain of donor-to-INGO-to-partner.

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<sup>75</sup> While a feeling of shock may be another possible entrypoint for clustering practices, here, I use it as an indication of a break with “business as usual.”

Thereby, the donor's rejection of the relationship as more than a contractual transaction also threatens the future funding of INGOs and possibly their local partners. In addition, it shapes the INGO's identity in a broader perspective (which will be discussed more in Chapter 4) and its way of working. In Marcos' words,

“it boxes us in [shows small box ‘walls’ with his hands, on the table] even more in the model of professional NGO as a service provider /.../ which makes it difficult to work in a ... methodology based on partnership. Because you cannot expect the same from your own partners. And I also think it's wrong!”

Marcos' strong reaction shows INGOs' dependence on the model donors are using, as these provide certain roles and criteria for INGOs to work within. When these models clash with INGOs' own “methodology based on partnership,” the space to listen to partners and take what they say into account, rather than just “expect the same” (transactional relations) from them, becomes more limited.

In the following, and final example of how INGOs work to link their local partners to donors we see that not only do INGOs try to make partners more like donors and pull donors closer by exposing them to partners' contexts. When this rapprochement is not possible in the immediate time frame, INGO practices also link partners and donors by serving as buffers in the gap that remains between them.

*C) Ex 9: Buffering – acting the link: “[W]e try to understand the situation, ‘what happened here? [has] someone in the family [] died or...’”*

“[W]e don't just say ‘oh my god this is so bad’ [again, laughs a little] but we *do* something. And we try to find out, we try to to *understand* the situation, ‘what happened here?’ Do they have a lot to do, sometimes it can be personal stuff, someone in the family has died or...”

This is part of the answer from my interviewee Renate when I ask what good partnership is in relation to her everyday tasks. She explains:

“At a more concrete level, [like] I just heard [happened], if a partner has sent us a *really bad* ... a surprisingly bad [laughs a little] report or application. Ok, what do we do? Our whole way of working is to /.../ check first, what has happened, and work with them around that. That’s our *modus operandi* /.../”

A “*really bad*” report can be hard for INGOs to understand for several reasons, such as bad English, incomprehensible structure, or mixing activities and comments with goals and results. Renate follows up by giving examples of what kind of things they can “*do*” in case they get such a report:

“[w]e prolong a deadline, we can ask helping questions [and] we try to be accommodating regarding budget reallocations. And that’s /.../ important to our partners, just as it is for us [in relation to donors]. If something has happened and you need to change a little... that flexibility shouldn’t be underestimated.”

Renate’s examples thus show concretely what listening to understand and adapting to what they hear can look like in INGOs’ daily work. Being flexible, listening to partners’ concerns and what may have “happened,” even taking personal tragedies into account, are all parts of good partnership for the INGOs I talk to. And when they “prolong a deadline,” “ask helping questions,” or “try to be accommodating,” INGOs take on the responsibility of buffering between their local partners and the donors at the other end of the “chain.” That is, as a step towards the goal of linking partners directly to donors, in the meanwhile, INGOs *are* a link in that chain, and use their in-between position to buffer what seems to be – at the moment – irreconcilable needs of those other actors.

In other words, while we have seen in Examples 7 and 8 how INGOs work to link partners and donors, by pulling them closer to each other, this example illustrates that INGOs are also prepared to stretch themselves to fill the gap that may remain. Some of the consequences for INGO staff and their possibilities to listen when demands are contradictory have already been

revealed in Chapter 2, as tension and stress. In this section, I want to give a few more examples of INGO buffering practices and discuss their potential effects on INGOs' listening to partners.

One such potential effect on listening is depending on the relationship with one's own donor. As the previous Example 8 made clear, it is not always easy for INGOs to negotiate with their donors. While some donors show understanding if you need to "change partners half-way through," others (at least seem to) demand that once a plan is approved then "*that's* what you do goddamn it." With Renate's emphasis on flexibility, the donor's attitude becomes important. It determines the toll it will take on INGO margins and adaptability to "prolong a deadline" or accept "a budget reallocation." If the donor is not flexible, INGOs will be more pressured to close their ears to partner concerns, to "what has happened." It may push INGOs to demand compliance with the original plans, or it may take its toll on the INGO's own – often limited – margins in terms of staff time or monetary resources, adding to the stress discussed in Chapter 2.

In a similar example, nothing particular had "happened" to explain the "really bad" report. Indeed, my interviewee Leyla sighed that "when it's reporting, ah! Same problem every single year." When I asked "So, what do you do?" she curtly answered "Nothing!" However, she then went on to explain several actions she and her colleagues actually had taken, including going "back and forth with e-mails, [saying] 'do this and do that, do not touch here, touch here,'" and not only e-mails, but also "phone calls [and if] necessary, we sit, sit together." This is another instance of Carrie's "*eight times*" of revision quoted above, where the INGO accepts more work than planned because of other priorities and values. In Carrie's example that priority was capacity building. In this case, the INGO values the local partner's peacebuilding work together with an organization from "the other side" of the conflict lines, with whom Leyla admits that the partner has "very good activities."



However, Leyla then described at length the internal INGO discussions the repeatedly bad reports give rise to, as the different team members try to agree what is “good partnership” in this situation. On the one hand, the partner is doing “very good activities.” On the other hand, it has also had several chances to improve reporting of these activities – and there are other local organizations that are doing good things that the INGO might consider supporting. But, as the INGO’s own donor is unclear on future funding there is not time (again, underlining the importance of time) to develop a new qualitative partnership, so why not continue supporting this group? Meanwhile, according to Leyla, the local partner themselves say they have trouble with the reporting because “due to lack of funds /.../ they don’t have a specialist.” There is thus a number of considerations that play into INGOs’ decisions in relation to local partners, from whether to make big changes like ending the partnership or funding a reporting specialist, to small things like sending another reminder e-mail, making another phone call, or visiting to “sit together” and “have coffee and go through the financial report.” Even this constant decision-making and the team discussions are part of the buffering practices INGOs undertake to link partners and donors.

Another buffering strategy to get some room to maneuver could be called pre-emptive vagueness and is used by INGOs when they develop their applications (and reports) to donors. This strategy could be characterized as another balancing act where INGOs draw on their in-between position and practical knowledge of the game. On the one hand, as is clear from the examples so far, such applications must be increasingly detailed in terms of activities, budgets, and not least, expected results. On the other hand, several interviewees express the importance of being “vague on purpose” (Carrie) and “keeping it broad” (Manali) at the application stage in order to build in room to maneuver later in the project. This can be done in explicit discussions

with the donor, if the relationship so allows, but if not, careful wording can also be used, such as “saying ‘build capacity’, but not which kind of capacity” (Manali). While applications are preemptively kept as broad as the demand for detail allows, there are also ways of creating room for (re-)interpretation in relation to reports of an ongoing project.

Vague reports can be crucial when INGOs want to highlight and get credit for results that were achieved but not expected at the time of planning the project, or when they want to build on unexpected successes to a greater extent than foreseen. Sara, whose story about facilitation featured above, brings up an example of particularly “successful work with [thematic] workshops, training of trainers [where] we don’t really have money to follow-up [even though] it’s important to get that work more long-term, more sustainable.” She laughs a bit hesitantly several times in the following quote, and I quote at length as it illustrates how difficult for her to explain how they managed to fit the desired but unforeseen follow-up into their funded project:

“And that’s why we have, well, seen how we can...fit it into [laughs hesitantly] into our...even if we don’t have funding directly for this, it’s still close to, it’s a pre-condition you could say for everything else that we do. So, we still see it as possible to fit in [laughs again] into the projects that we have. Even if it’s not a main focus. So we try to adjust to the need we see, but..., yeah, as much as possible.”

When I probe to see if Sara and the INGO had a direct communication with the donor about this adjustment, she clarifies that it was mainly an internal discussion: “It was really in communication with our head office. Because they sat with the whole results matrix, and knew, well ‘does this fit under this /.../ can we motivate this,’ and they made the assessment that ‘yes, we can, and there are these funds, so go for it.’” As an afterthought, she adds “They [the head office] in turn for sure were in contact with [the donor], but we didn’t have the direct contact.” Sara’s example shows that INGOs’ interpretation practices in the reporting stages also can serve to buffer between donor demands for detailed planning and the unpredictable project contexts

partners are working in. It also shows buffering may require risk-taking; either risking to not follow up the promising results they see if these do not fit the matrix, or risking the relationship with the donor, should the donor disapprove of their interpretation.

In taking on the responsibility to buffer between donors and partners, INGOs thus rely on practical knowledge of how much space they can create within the detailed plans demanded by donors and what interpretations of what happened are likely to pass in the reporting phase. This requires listening skills to gauge donor flexibility, both from the individuals and the institution involved. Helpful in buffering is, again, money for staff who can “sit together” with partners and develop good relationships with donors, not to mention the internal communication between staff themselves as well as their experience and creativity in finding acceptable interpretations. Also, again, INGOs are helped in listening by a nuanced understanding of partners. Partners may be doing “very good activities” in peacebuilding despite poor reporting; they may be encountering “personal stuff” related to (or not) living in a war zone; and they may be facing trouble in recruiting a “specialist” with the right skills in their conflict context. Listening openly is limited by lack of either of these: money, internal factors, or a nuanced attitude to partners. That is, if there is less money for people to talk or a less flexible donor, then worse reports must be accepted (or rewritten by the INGO, something that was mentioned as an occasional solution), or more emphasis must be placed on partners’ reporting skills rather than on the quality of their peacebuilding activities.

#### *D) Responsibility (linking) section summary*

This section has analyzed three examples in which INGO practitioners experienced a fulfilling sense of responsibility in working to link their local partners with institutional donors. Rather than three distinct stories, Examples 7-9 clustered fragments from different interviews to describe how INGOs link partners with donors in three ways: by making partners more like

donors; by exposing donors to more of partners contexts; and by temporarily buffering the remaining gap between partners and donors. The examples reveal that, like facilitation and translation in previous sections, linking requires practical skill, including listening. By listening carefully, both for partner capacities and donor demands, INGOs balance pushing partners to adapt to donor terminology and logic with allowing them more time to do so. By listening, INGOs also work to pull donors and their requirements closer to partners by inviting them to (what INGOs see as) suitable activities in “the backcountry” and other events or formats where partners’ contexts are exposed. And finally, INGOs listen to understand whether and how they themselves can work longer, better, or more creatively to buffer the gap that may remain between donors and partners. The examples confirm that time, money, internal, and external factors are helpful to INGOs in their listening to partners.

However, as in the previous sections, contradictions in the examples also show how listening openly is difficult for INGOs when they are buffering. In addition to donor formats and overarching frameworks for project management and results monitoring, INGOs must keep balancing their donor relationships. While they strive for open communication and trust-building they also prepare pre-emptive vagueness strategies and back-up plans for the contingency that donor representatives suddenly reinterpret their relationship from partnering to transactional. The precarity in relation to their donors thus influence INGOs’ relationship with partners and their possibilities to listen, as well as their identities in a broader sense. In the following two-step analysis, I delve into the chapter findings in more depth.

#### **4. First step analysis: INGOs do listen and draw on their in-between status to do so**

The nine examples above show that INGO practitioners do not only feel tension, stress, and anxiety as discussed in Chapter 2, but also experience positive emotions. Probing these

experiences and the practices related to them adds to our understanding of their listening in several ways. Whereas Chapter 2 brought out everyday obstacles and structural contradictions as emotions indicated things INGOs must do and must not do to demonstrate competence, this chapter brings out things INGOs want to do and think they should. Two findings are immediately striking: INGOs' in-between position is a resource in facilitating, translating, and linking, and that these practices involve INGOs as listening, often intently so.

First, INGOs draw on their in-between position to facilitate between local actors, translate between partners and decision-makers, and link partners closer to donors.<sup>76</sup> For example, Sara's white skin signals her belonging to the international community, which allows her to speak to local authorities her partners cannot approach, while her civil society role allows her to be "there together" with local activists. Through Monica's political preparation she listens for policy buzzwords "in fashion" in the international sphere, while her frequent contact with partners updates her on local stories translatable to such trends. Through their back-and-forth with partners over donor demands, Manali and her team learn which demands are more taxing given partners' situation and they can invite donor representatives to "the field" to visit such contexts which are less known. In their mundanity, these examples illustrate what Bourdieu calls the ongoing "struggles" (1990, 138) in the field, where actors push to get their own knowledge recognized. Influencing what becomes the common knowledge taken for granted over time means shaping the background against which practices are judged as competent or incompetent (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 16) and increasing your own chances of being perceived as a competent player. To be deemed competent in facilitating, translating, and linking, INGOs thus use their position to listen to peacebuilding actors in both spheres.

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<sup>76</sup> Here, I broaden the in-between slightly in both directions, to mean that INGOs share part of their identity with other internationals as well as with donors and part of their identity with local partners as civil society groups.

This leads us directly to the second finding: that INGO practitioners do listen and do so in many different ways. They listen intently for what is sensitive and meaningful to their partners in conflict-resolution discussions, even if this is cloaked in banal conversation about wine and candy (Ex. 1, facilitation). They listen for ways to repeatedly push their partners' priorities even when international decision-makers find these hard to understand and prefer to receive a list of priorities to granting influence over negotiating such priorities (Ex. 5, translation). And they listen for which concessions, such as a later deadline, may help partners through a rough time brought on by personal tragedy, societal drama, or organizational weakness (Ex. 9, linking).

All in all, this chapter overwhelmingly shows that INGOs do listen (and conditions which help them do so), not least to their partners. This finding is unexpected, given the puzzling gap that motivated the research, between the normative consensus that internationals should listen and the practice-based finding that locals do not feel heard. The analysis shows the potential of practice-based approaches to bring the ““dirt” that gives depth to the material” (Bicchi and Bremberg 2016, 395, citing Kuus). Perhaps we could say that the finding that INGOs do listen through these practices closes part of the gap, at least in those moments. So, what does it bring to the overall question? Is the answer to the question “Why are internationals so bad at listening to their local partners?” merely “they’re not”?

In fact, the finding that INGOs do listen to their partners leaves a lot of contradictions unexamined. Taking practices seriously also means paying attention to their messiness, or their “fuzziness” (Bourdieu 1990, 86). After all, Bourdieu cautions that the coherence of practices depends as much on “their ‘fuzziness’ and their irregularities and even incoherences” as on “their unity and their regularities” (Bourdieu 1990, 86, both quotes). In other words, practices are coherent to a point, and after that they are practical. But by leaving emotions out of the equation,

practice-based researchers leave out much of this fuzziness and contradictions; and doing so, they also leave us puzzled as to why practices characterized by colonial hierarchies continue. Therefore, in the next section I examine some of these contradictions more closely through another layer of feminist theory. Specifically, I use Sara Ahmed's work on emotions as orienting devices to ask *toward what* INGOs' attention is directed in these practices, and what this adds to our understanding of whether and how they can listen to their local partners.

### **5. Second step analysis: examining the orientation of INGOs**

This section analyzes what INGO practitioners' stories tell us about their *orientation* when they are facilitating, translating, and linking, as literature on receptive listening states it should be "partner-oriented" (Park-Kang 2011, 875, on "utmost listening"). To do so, I draw again on Sara Ahmed, particularly her work on orientation in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). In this work, Ahmed builds on her concept (introduced in Chapter 1) of emotions as social and relational rather than individual and inherent, to theorize orientation as fundamentally related to both historical norms and intended futures.<sup>77</sup> While we may expect to find INGOs oriented away from partners, given that local actors generally feel unheard, my analysis first examines *toward what* INGOs are oriented. This part of the analysis surprisingly reveals that INGOs are extremely oriented toward partners in their daily tasks. However, then turning to examine *how* they are so improves our understanding of why partners do not feel heard by showing that *what (or who) disappears into the background* works to impede receptive listening and an equal partnership.

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<sup>77</sup> Ahmed's view of emotions as related to both historical and future conditions aligns with Bourdieu's emphasis on historicization of practices and his view that people tend toward goals that are reachable given their social position, what he calls "the body's readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social" (1990, 57).

First, according to Ahmed, emotions work as orienting devices that turn the subject toward or away from their objects (2014, 4).<sup>78</sup> That emotions are relational means that they are not inherent in a subject or an object but say something about the relationship between them. This relationship does not arise out of thin air but is shaped by historical power relations which have created paths or “lines” that subjects can follow comfortably – if they are the kinds of subject that can align with such lines. Historical norms thus shape the orientation of subjects by tracing paths that different subjects can follow with varying degrees of ease or comfort.

As an example, Ahmed takes the history of racism which has made it more likely for some bodies to be considered “strangers” and potential “dangers” (2006, 142). While many white persons can follow some paths comfortably (even avoiding punishment for murder), a person of color risks being stopped (or even killed) when trying to follow the same “lines.”<sup>79</sup> In parallel, colonialism has created paths where “internationals” have higher status and (thus) are assumed to know more than “locals.”<sup>80</sup> When subjects (individual or organizational) deviate from such paths they are seen as “out of line.” Local actors are likely to be dismissed as experts while internationals may be expected to deliver superior solutions.<sup>81</sup> This way, history contributes to our orientation, making paths easier or harder for different subjects to follow. This is the basis for my claim in Chapter 2 that many INGO practices are “sticky with colonialism.” But while lines we follow have passed through history, they also point toward the future. How they do so combines to shape our orientation in the present.

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<sup>78</sup> An object is “anything the feeling is directed towards” (Ahmed 2014, 214).

<sup>79</sup> Ahmed refers to the well-known 2012 case where George Zimmerman (white) shot and killed Trayvon Martin (black). Zimmerman motivated this with his assessment of Martin as suspicious and potentially dangerous, a judgement which held up in court and got him acquitted (2014, 211-212).

<sup>80</sup> Ahmed points out that whiteness is not literally about being white but how strongly you are associated with that category. Similarly, Autessere (2014, 59) cites a Congolese businessman in DRC who, by saying he is from another country, experiences an immediate increase in his status by moving into the “international” category.

<sup>81</sup> Cohen (2013) cites stories from both Northern and Southern peacebuilding professionals of Northerners meeting resistance when trying to initiate a more equal dialogue. Autessere (2014) cites similar examples.



According to Ahmed (2006, 27), “consciousness is intentional” and this intention affects how we perceive the world. I quote a longer passage:

“I can perceive an object only insofar as *my orientation allows me to see it* (it must be near enough to me, which in turn means that I must be near enough to it), and in *seeing it*, in this way or that, it becomes an “it,” which *means I have already taken an orientation toward it*” (2006, 27, emphases added).

In other words, “what we can see in the first place depends on which way we are facing” (2006, 29) which depends on where we are heading – perhaps in line with paths laid out for subjects like us. Ahmed takes the example of perceiving a table, where the intentions of the person will contribute to the assessment of it. Whether the person is intending to use it as support for writing or to lay out today’s dinner will affect if it is perceived with warm feelings as appropriate (fulfilling or even exceeding expectations) or with irritation, as too large or too small, too central or peripheral, etc. Or if it is too different from what is expected (not near enough), it may not be perceived as a table – or an object – at all. In parallel, much of the criticism against peacebuilding is of internationals being too oriented toward pre-determined solutions (e.g. Mac Ginty 2011). Such criticism argues that only a narrow range of options are perceived as acceptable intentions (goals) by internationals and only actions that seem (or strive) to fulfil expectations toward such goals, will be perceived warmly.

I argue that the positive experiences of emotions brought out in this chapter are part of such a narrow range of intentions (at least partly, which I will get to in Chapter 4). Ahmed’s work helps us see the pride, Yes!-moments, and responsibility that practitioners feel when facilitating, translating, and linking, as part of INGOs’ orientation to support local partners within existing peacebuilding structures. In other words, the milestones they celebrate are part of the “old game” of peacebuilding.

This “old game” is characterized by colonial hierarchies, where internationals always retain the most important power; to know what is the right goal as well as progress toward it. It is progress within this game to make international decision-makers stop and “say nothing” and “*then*” discuss “strategy not in place,” to get women’s organizations included in a security committee set up by internationals, or to be invited to high-level hearings where a country’s future is decided by internationals. And so, it is not surprising that practitioners experience a Yes!-moment when these things happen. It is considered a sustainable result if local civil society partners can fund their activities with money from Northern governments. Therefore, it is understandable that INGOs feel a responsibility to link partners closer to donors by prolonging a deadline to allow for yet another revision of the report. And it is definitively a worthy goal to decrease violent conflict or societal tension. Therefore, it is not to guilt practitioners who feel proud for facilitating dialogues across social divides that I want to point out that it also works within the colonial logic of locating conflict between natives, excluding international dynamics from the picture. Instead, I do so to make visible the continuities of colonialism into the emotional life of their daily practices. The mere familiarity of the practices along these historically shaped “lines” and the cultural proximity of the goals they lead to thus make them comfortable to reach for,<sup>82</sup> and hitting milestones along the way is perceived with warm feelings despite the old game characteristics of these milestones.

Second, orientation depends on one’s own location which “decides” what comes into view” (Ahmed 2006, 14); but this location itself often recedes into the background and becomes invisible as we (usually) take our own starting point as given. One could say that we do not see it

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<sup>82</sup> With this I do not mean practitioners are comfortable colonialists. In fact, many expressed discomfort about the similarities between their work and what colonial administration. However, just as Autessere and Goetze (as discussed in Chapter 2) stop short of analyzing this identified similarity, practitioners often find it difficult to operationalize this discomfort into alternatives, which will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

as we are busy seeing from it. It is also easy to lose sight of the work which enabled us to reach this point, particularly if that work also seemed “given” to us. This is particularly the case when we are comfortable, as comfort signals that we are aligned with our own and others’ expectations. Returning to the example of the table, Ahmed notes that when the male philosopher sits down to write, it may be easy for him to forget that his wife may have cleared the table, that she has already worked to enable him to do his work. Instead, he can comment on others’ positions and movements, while forgetting the background conditions that enable his orientation to those others. His own position becomes “a “point” that is not seen as it is also “the point” from which we see” (2006, 135). Merging Ahmed’s vocabulary with that of practice theorists, such “tacit and inarticulate” knowledge of how things are, is “the dominant interpretive backdrop that sets the terms of interaction [and] defines a horizon of possibility [for] practices and their boundaries” (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 16). Those actors who comfortably fit into the dominant perspective can thus forget that their orientation comes from a particular location and adopt what Bourdieu calls “the *imperialism of the universal*” (2000, 71, emphasis in original) where they themselves disappear from view, from the discussion about what is going on in the field.

In parallel, I argue that this chapter shows that INGO practitioners through their practices make themselves and their particular – and political – location invisible. The practices where they feel comfortable that they are doing *things they want to and think they should do* involve supreme attention to their partners. As demonstrated above, INGOs are constantly asking questions and probing stories, to ensure they really understand what kinds of problems, visions, organizational structures and procedures, political contexts and relationships, family issues, and so on that their local partners experience. They do this to coach, train, and support local partners to become competent actors for peace, as persons, organizations, and, ultimately, countries. This

probing orientation is completely in line with the colonial mission to explore, classify, and improve the natives and their context. It also aligns with the more recent emphasis on contextual knowledge which aims to enable the international actor to know how to adapt blueprint solutions to local conditions. Meanwhile, international practitioners themselves, their organizations, and their countries are almost invisible as particular actors – even though our conversations were framed as about relations that are supposed (or strive) to be equal, involving internationals as parts of the *partnerships*.

Instead, it is almost like INGOs through their practices patch up an invisibility cloak that hides their organizational strengths and weaknesses, personal circumstances, and geopolitics from their partners. While such issues may be discussed within their organization (or even with the donor – who demands similar transparency of INGOs as INGOs do of their partners), they are usually completely off the table between partners. In the next chapter I will revisit the interviews to go into more depth on how the invisibility cloak is patched up in different layers and covering different types of international actors. But simply put, in Ahmed’s terminology, we might say that rather than sharing seats around the table and the orientation toward common joys and challenges, INGOs seem to hover around a table where partners are laid out for inspection. This way, the invisibility of INGOs undermines the possibilities of a power-sensitive conversation (Haraway 1988). A conversation between equal actors requires both partners to be present. That is, to hear, INGOs must first appear.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> I acknowledge Hannah Arendt’s (1998) work on appearance as a condition for political action as a basis for my conclusion.

## 6. Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed examples of practitioners experiencing positive emotions in their daily work. As the negative feelings identified in Chapter 2 illustrated obstacles and limits in the everyday provided by the historical traces of an old, colonial game, I wanted to investigate whether positive emotions would point toward an imagined future game of more equal relations. At first, it seemed promising. The practice-based step of the analysis showed that practitioners' feelings of pride, Yes!-moments, and responsibility are related to practices that INGOs want to and think they should do, including facilitating, translating, and linking between partners and other actors. This step also revealed that INGOs do listen and draw on their in-between position to do so. However, settling for these findings would have meant ignoring contradictions and stopping short of taking the "fuzziness" of emotions and other practices into account. Doing so would also have left the puzzling gap between the norm to listen and the practice where locals are not heard intact.

Therefore, the second step of the analysis pushed further by using feminist work on emotions as orientating devices, which added to our understanding in two ways. First, while INGOs are strongly partner-oriented (a condition for receptive listening), *how* they listen in these positive moments often works to reproduce the old peacebuilding game. In other words, the joy in facilitating, translating, and linking partners with other actors often indicates INGOs are hitting milestones laid out along historical lines characterized by colonial hierarchies. Second, this one-sided attention to local partners works to make INGO practitioners invisible and thereby absent from the partnership as political actors. Through ordinary practices, we can say that practitioners patch up a comfortable invisibility cloak where their own issues, weaknesses, and stands are kept off the partnership table as I develop in the following chapter.

In Chapter 4, I discuss why invisible internationals would be a problem and how the invisibility cloak is patched up in different layers. Simply put, I argue that to listen receptively, internationals must first “appear” as political subjects. For my argument to matter beyond these three INGOs, I zoom out to the field writ large through interviews with donors and peace researchers to examine peacebuilding internationals in general as a Subject. I conclude that their invisibility is a concrete and structural obstacle to their receptive listening to local actors. I end the chapter by discussing how the findings improve our understanding of what types of practices could be expected to contribute to change, a sore point for practice theory.

By examining Bourdieusian reflexivity, its contributions and limits as a tool toward change, I conclude that it leaves little hope that the Subject can learn to listen. The main reason is that practice approaches today are so focused on the competent players who are dominant today, while at the same time ignoring their potential losses, particularly emotional ones, should the game change. However, turning to Ahmed’s (and others’) work helps us learn lessons from actors who are used to (being deemed as) failing existing games. Flipping such feminist insights from work with marginalized actors to analyze the relative privilege of internationals (in relation to locals), I find that it is neither positive nor negative feelings that indicate the most radical possibilities for change. Instead, I see hints of a new, more equal game in practices characterized by internationals’ vulnerability, self-questioning discomfort, and uncertainty. In other words, my main conclusion is that the emotional is political. This is taken up in Chapter 5, which develops the dissertation’s contributions, which are practical, methodological, empirical, and theoretical.

## CHAPTER 4: CAN THE SUBJECT (LEARN TO) LISTEN? Failing to change the game

”It’s not supposed to be about us!”

*INGO interviewee*

“Well, I don’t care if [internationals] are tired – the refugee woman they’re supposed to be helping is also tired”

*PhD-advisor, February 2017 (approx. quote)*

“I would expect that [INGOs] experience a lot of emotions as they are working in war zones, but this...this is just office politics!”

*Researcher discussant, January 2017 (approx. quote)*

These quotes show some – exasperated, mocking, even hostile – responses to my early versions of the conclusion that the emotions INGO practitioners experience could be relevant to how they do peacebuilding. So far, I have developed this line of thought in two empirical chapters. In Chapter 2, I investigated what practitioners’ expressions of tension, stress, and anxiety could tell us about the conditions for them listening receptively (or not) to their local peacebuilding partners in their daily work. I found that these negative emotions both make up concrete obstacles to receptive listening to local partners and indicate historical traces that make practices “sticky with colonialism.” In Chapter 3, I investigated whether and how practitioners’ expressions of pride, Yes!-moments of achievement, and responsibility indicate moments of a new, more equal game. I found that on the one hand these positive emotions indicate that INGOs do listen. On the other hand, the way they listen often reproduces historical power patterns and makes internationals themselves invisible within the partnerships. While the quotes above seem to indicate that such an invisibility cloak is appropriate, in this chapter, I show that it actually hinders change towards a more equal game of receptive listening by internationals. You could say that “to hear, they must appear.”

At first glance, an invisibility cloak for INGOs seems like a good thing. As the quotes above express, it seems desirable to keep discussions about INGOs off the agenda of peacebuilding partnerships. After all, listening demands “partner-orientation” and “self-regulation” (Park-Kang 2011). Indeed, the feminist analysis in Chapter 3 of emotions as orienting devices showed that in many of their everyday activities INGOs are extremely oriented towards their partners. In practice terms, being competent players in today’s peacebuilding “game” requires INGOs to constantly ask, observe, and evaluate their partners, while they themselves become invisible. In the words of my interviewee quoted above – “it’s not supposed to be about [them].” That is why I say that INGOs, through a multitude of mundane practices, patch up an invisibility cloak that hides them from view. However, while wearing an invisibility cloak may mean INGOs are “dressed for success” in the old, hierarchical version of the game, it makes INGOs stumble when aiming to change peacebuilding into a more equal one. This is because the one-directional attention invisibility brings about is revealed as quite problematic, at a closer look.

In this chapter, I subject the INGO invisibility cloak to such a close scrutiny. First, I briefly go through why both liberal and critical peacebuilding research has looked away from the invisibility of internationals and how I draw on feminist approaches to motivate reversing the gaze. In other words, I flip the famous question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 1988) and its emphasis on strengthening the voices of marginalized people, to focus on the privileged actors as in the chapter heading “Can the Subject (Learn to) Listen?”

Second, I empirically scrutinize the layers and reach of the invisibility cloak. By going back to my interviews and observations with INGOs, I study in more detail how these practitioners make themselves invisible in different dimensions. Through their daily practices,



the cloak gets layered to hide them from attention personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. Then I zoom out (Nicolini 2009, 2012) from this close examination to investigate the reach of the invisibility cloak, that is, to see if other actors wear it. Through additional interviews and observations with other international peacebuilding actors, such as donors and peace researchers, I find that that the invisibility cloak is not just used in INGO circles. Instead, it is a wardrobe essential that internationals in peacebuilding wear to show they are competent players. Therefore, invisibility is my key focus in investigating the possibilities for change.

Third, I subject these empirical findings to another two-step analysis to better understand the possibilities internationals have of changing their outfit (by pulling at its seams or dropping it altogether) given invisibility's problematic effects for listening. Here, I address the question in the chapter heading indirectly, by asking: "Can the Subject Change?" As in previous chapters, the analysis begins with Bourdieusian practice approaches and moves to Ahmedian feminism.

Practice approaches help us understand belief in invisibility as part of the "illusio," the shared stakes that make up the "field" of competent peacebuilding actors. Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" illuminates how actors in parallel with their competence also develop their goals to fit what is considered possible and desirable in the field. Finally, Bourdieu's work on "reflexivity" provides insights for other fields on how academics *as practitioners* (of research) can contribute to change in their own (scholarly) game. Bourdieu insists that to change their game scholars must, so to speak, break the spell of their own illusio: the idea of being an invisible observer outside whatever field they are studying. Key to doing so is making themselves and their positions visible. However, the focus on practices as *competent* performances means Bourdieu and his followers stop short of developing insights on conditions and consequences of *failure*. As

we can see *change as a failure* to follow the old rules, the focus on competence limits the usefulness of practice approaches.

Therefore, I again turn to Sara Ahmed, who pays particular attention to the embodied and emotional aspects of both doing and being incompetent (in her words "out of place") and to what resources can sustain actors in such ambitions. This attention to failure and emotions related to it, gives us a richer picture of the stakes involved in being considered a competent – and thus invisible – peacebuilding international. However, if a new, more equal game is ever to develop, some actors have to deviate from the present criteria of competence – that is, fail – in order to practice new skills and develop alternatives. Usually, the efforts to change unequal hierarchies falls on marginalized actors who are already burdened by being seen as failing just by being different than the norm. For internationals to contribute to change efforts, they must choose to lose their privilege of invisibility, that is, to purposefully fail the present game. However, becoming visible involves risks. It means breaking the shared orientation in the community of practice, questioning the game, and becoming what Ahmed calls a "killjoy." Thus, failing means emotional exposure, becoming open and vulnerable, experiencing discomfort or even pain, as well as living with greater uncertainty of what will happen to oneself and the game writ large.

Ahmed's writings on feminist change work thus adds another layer of understanding to the puzzling reproduction of non-listening internationals in peacebuilding partnerships. However, Ahmed's insights are drawn from working with change actors who are marginalized. Therefore, I flip each lesson learned from Ahmed, to suggest what working purposefully for change (in Ahmed's words, willfully) means for privileged actors. How the findings contribute practically to internationals' work toward stitching up a new outfit is the topic of Chapter 5, which also develops the methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions of the

dissertation. To start the investigation, a brief overview of how different strands of peace research have (not) treated the invisibility of internationals follows.

That internationals make themselves invisible in partnerships (as found in Chapter 3) can seem common sense to otherwise opposing research on peacebuilding. Both liberal (mainstream) and critical approaches to peacebuilding would probably applaud the one-sided attention that I found internationals shower on their local partners, although for different reasons. On the one hand, liberal peacebuilding is concerned with how countries in conflict as quickly as possible can develop institutions and traditions that resemble those in Western democracies, who rarely fight armed conflicts within their own countries or with other democracies.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, liberal peacebuilding usually focuses on how to reform which institutions in the country where the armed conflict is played out, in which order, and with what degree and form of inclusivity in the process (Fortna and Howard 2008; Jarstad and Sisk 2008). According to liberal peacebuilding, it thus makes sense to focus on the local area and actors, to identify strengths and weaknesses for capacity building, potential allies and spoilers for reform measures, etc. Simplified, this view can be summarized: Western actors dominate world affairs, which is fine as things are working better there. The only reason to pay attention to internationals is to evaluate whether they are effective and ethical as interveners upon the local context, and perhaps whether they are useful as models to aim for.

On the other hand, critical peace researchers may also approve with a focus on locals rather than on internationals. As Western domination of international relations (and IR) is usually considered an unjust continuation of colonialism, they often take internationals to task for *not*

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<sup>84</sup> The thesis that democracies do not make war on each other was (to my knowledge) launched in its modern format by Doyle (1986) and has been thoroughly, if mostly quantitatively, researched as the “Democratic Peace Theory.” Powerful critiques against this thesis often start by examining the definitions of “democracy,” “peace,” and/or “war” to offer alternative explanations (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Oren 2014).

*paying enough attention* to local actors and contexts. Instead, critical peace researchers point out, internationals too often work with generic blue-print solutions imported from other intervention sites, what Roger Mac Ginty has called trying to bring a ready-made “peace from IKEA” (2011, 39). Such research tends to focus on how domination renders the subordinate actor invisible, or visible in a certain, restrictive way, and to document strategies of resistance and their effects (Campbell et al. 2011; Jabri 2013; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). In sum, neither mainstream nor critical approaches deeply problematize the invisibility of international peacebuilding actors.

Like critical peace research, broader strands of critical research have produced an abundant literature on strengthening the voices of the marginalized groups, whether they be women (in relation to men), people of color (in relation to white people), or queer people (in relation to straight people). However, in such work, there is often a recognition, if not often developed further, that the dominant gaze of the privileged “master” leaves the master himself outside scrutiny. For example, in *Imperial Encounters*, Roxanne Doty (1996) notes “the reversal of visibility that is characteristic of disciplinary power: those who are monitored have the greatest visibility, while *the sovereign is relatively invisible*” (142, emphasis added).<sup>85</sup> There is

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<sup>85</sup> I want to distinguish my use of in/visibility from two different discussions about in/visibility of internationals in peacebuilding in particular and white people in general. First, I do not mean internationals are “invisible” as persons or organizations in the physical locations where peacebuilding is taking place. On the contrary, Autessere (2014), Smirl (2015) and others have thoroughly documented the often blatant material visibility of international actors. For example, there are often signs posted of which international actor funded particular buildings, roads, workshops, etc. Smirl points out how the perception of such visibility varies between positions: while it seemed “necessary and generally unproblematic” to international aid workers, for “aid recipients, the most prominent aspect of any development intervention are the material manifestations such as white land rovers, gated compounds, and helicopters” (<https://spacesofaid.wordpress.com/>, last accessed April 25, 2018). Second, in a general argument about whiteness as an invisible norm, Ahmed (2004a, 1) points out that the norm is generally invisible “only for those who inhabit it. [Whereas f]or those who don’t, it is hard not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere.” Recognizing this asymmetry must, according to Ahmed, also influence how studies taking whiteness as their object are carried out, most notably by recognizing that it was first recognized and articulated by scholars from the margin: “Any critical genealogy of whiteness studies, for me, must begin with the direct political address of Black feminists such as Lorde, rather than later work by white academics on representations of whiteness or on how white people experience their whiteness” (2004 a, 1). Ahmed’s concern is that without such recognition of Black feminist critique prompting the study of whiteness as an object, whiteness studies can themselves turn into mechanisms reproducing racist hierarchies: “To put this more

growing recognition of the need to reverse that gaze. Doing so means paying more attention to the dominant actors who uphold the norms, and to the norms themselves, whether these be men (and patriarchy), white people (and racism/colonialism), or straight people (and heteronormativity). This is visible in the broadening of academic (sub)disciplines, from only women to gender (or even masculinity) studies, from postcolonial to decolonial (or even whiteness or settler colonial) studies, and from lesbian/gay to queer studies.

It is in this critical and intersectional feminist spirit that I flip the common research question. Instead of asking what kind of in/visibility is forced on people in the margins (i.e. people who are “failing” to live up to the norms), I ask how the invisibility of the more privileged internationals works to shape their listening in their partnerships with local actors. In response to the introductory quotes above, the chapter thus aims to show why it is problematic to make internationals’ feelings about “office politics” (and other things) invisible. Instead, we *should* care if and why internationals are “tired” as this is likely to affect “the refugee woman they’re supposed to be helping.” If we want to change how the peacebuilding game is practiced, we should indeed make sure the game is also “about [them]!” Simply put, this is because a new, more equal game is much more likely if internationals are prepared to “fail” at the old one and capable of dealing with the emotional consequences. However, instead of negative or positive emotions providing useful indicators of (existing or possible) new-game practices, I find such alternatives by following moments of confusion, vulnerability, and discomfort.

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strongly, I will show how declaring one’s whiteness, even as part of a project of social critique, can reproduce white privilege in ways that are ‘unforeseen’.” (2004a, 3). Her concern seems to be validated empirically, at least according to a study on “white privilege pedagogy,” where the author finds that “Teaching whites to “unpack their invisible knapsack” does not make them more willing to take action against racial inequality. On the contrary, it makes them more complacent, more at home in an unjust world, and more comfortable with their whiteness” (Margolin 2015, 1). This is why I have articulated my research question based on concerns of the marginalized group in this relationship, the local actor (and why I build on postcolonial, feminist, and queer theory to analyze the data), as described in Chapter 1.

In sum, the chapter aims to show that “the Subject” of international peacebuilding might be able to learn to Listen, but it requires unraveling the invisibility cloak which protects this Subject from the discomforts of change. The next, empirical, section thus aims to increase our understanding of how this cloak is patched up and works, in three different layers: personally, organizationally, and geopolitically.

### **1. Patching up the invisibility cloak: three layers of invisibility**

In this section, I further investigate INGO practices empirically to understand more about how these contribute to making practitioners invisible. By going back to interviews and observations with INGOs (using examples from previous chapters and new ones), I find that through their daily practices, competent practitioners make themselves invisible in three layers: personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. Constantly orienting their attention to their partners’ personal, organizational, and geopolitical situations as objects to analyze, improve, and evaluate while ignoring and/or hiding their own will make them unable to connect in a more equal, power-sensitive conversation (Haraway 1988) about mutual concerns and challenges. One could say that in order to hear, they must first appear.

#### *A) Personally*

In my first example, one INGO interviewee, Stacey, shared a long story with me about a work dinner with partner organizations where a partner staff shared how his/her spouse died in the war. Clearly eager to tell me the story – speaking fast, raising her voice, filling it with upset emotion – Stacey described how she felt distressed at that moment. She did not only attribute it to the sadness she felt for that person’s loss, but also by what she perceived as the need to suppress any emotional reaction on her own part. In contrast, a recently hired colleague to Stacey had shed some tears in the moment as s/he was affected by the story, whereupon the partner

staff said (approximately) “thank you for letting yourself be moved.” When I asked Stacey why she felt she had to suppress (expressions of) her own sadness, she exclaimed, as quoted above, “It’s not supposed to be about us!”

A second example is from my own experience while working in a country office. When a Swedish colleague at a neighboring country office brought a visiting parent along to a few informal meetings with partner organizations, I was shocked (indicating how uncommon this was). It seemed wholly inappropriate to me that partners should get to know my colleague so personally, to the extent of meeting family members. My assumption was that getting personal made it impossible to remain objective in assessing the partner organizations’ applications and reports for financial support. As a contrast, my colleague talked at length about his/her own surprise at the immensely positive reaction by the partner organizations, who expressed great appreciation of this gesture of opening up, of my colleague showing a small sliver of her-/himself as a person.

Third, in Example 9 of Chapter 3, Renate takes responsibility to buffer between donors and partners by asking “what happened here, [has] someone in the family /.../ died or...” to consider an extended deadline for a report. However, while INGOs are oriented towards the personal situation of partner staff working in conflict-affected areas, the situation and emotions of INGO staff are not supposed to turn up between partners and INGOs.

My point with these examples is not that INGO staff should cry every time they hear of partners’ personal tragedies (and there can be many such opportunities) or that they must involve their own family details in partner relations (which may indeed influence power plays between partner organizations competing for funding from the INGO). Instead, I want to highlight two things: the commonsense inequality of attention and its colonial continuities. First, what is

considered common practice in so called equal partner relations is in fact highly unequal. Whereas partners are accepted, expected, perhaps even encouraged to share personal detail, even of tragedies – which may be instrumentalized (or assessed) as acceptable reasons for a late or bad report – INGO staff expect themselves to hold personal information off the table where partnership issues are discussed. Second, that in practicing this inequality, INGO subjects follow an old historical line of Western power patterns (discussed in Chapter 2). According to this pattern, any privileged actor should refrain from showing, sharing, or perhaps even feeling emotions – at least in relation to the marginalized actor. In other words, men should show and share (and perhaps even feel) less than women, white men less than colonized men, straight men less than gay men, etc. Emotionality itself is in the Western tradition strongly associated with less power, less authority, more passivity, and more femininity (Ahmed 2014, 3; Bourdieu 1990, 78; Gregory and Åhäll 2015, 2).

Acknowledging emotions means becoming vulnerable, open to questioning, and to change – all of these more appropriate for subalterns for a rational, empowered, and privileged Subject. The Subject has already arrived at the goal the subalterns are still aspiring to, being molded towards. Being perceived as in development, it is accepted, even encouraged for local partners to open up their personal lives as a part of the partnership relations, no matter how intrusive on their loss. Meanwhile, INGOs' commonsense practices make the persons working for INGOs invisible and this invisibility cloak protects them from such vulnerability. We are used to thinking of emotions as individual, this personal layer of the invisibility cloak is perhaps the easiest to imagine, like the shiny top gloss we first encounter. However, the personal is not the only dimension where this inequality of attention is practiced.



*B) Organizationally*

Perhaps the thickest layer of the invisibility cloak is made up by the unequal attention paid to how the organizations in the partnership are set up and carry out their work. Indeed, as Chapter 2 discussed, much of the direct aim of the partnership is to “build capacity” of the Southern organization (which indirectly is supposed to make it a more effective peace actor). With this as a starting point for the cooperation, it is perhaps not surprising that every aspect of local partner organizations is up for scrutiny while the strengths and weaknesses of the INGO rarely feature on the partnership agenda. In Chapters 2 and 3, we have seen numerous examples of weaknesses of partner organizations to be dealt with through capacity building, from policies and routines to implementation and strategies.

My first examples concern organizational policies and routines. Most obviously, as we have seen, partners financial routines and control are constantly prioritized for scrutiny and improvement. However, other policies are also up for discussion. These can include recruitment procedures, work environment, staff health and safety, etc. Meanwhile, a closer look at the examples reveals that INGOs themselves struggle with many similar challenges. As Chapter 2 in particular showed, the stress and exhaustion of the heavy workload and fast pace is a constant concern. In one example, Carrie described matter-of-factly how the workday often ends without her having “leaned back in [her] chair” when she realizes it is time to go home after answering “hundreds of e-mails.” At the same time as stress is a constant pressure for INGO staff, local partners are encouraged and “capacity built” to develop “sustainable” organizational routines which integrate staff health and safety issues. A different kind of pressure faces managers like Renate whose story in Chapter 2, described the tough decisions involved in handling “the pain, the very real pain” of staff. Her staff in turn decide about funding, and thus which partner organizations will be able to continue their work and which will have to lay off staff in some of

the worst economic conditions in the world (on top of the armed conflict). Despite this, advice is rarely (if ever) sought from partner organizations who live in such conditions and deal with such dilemmas all the time.

My second example of unequal attention concerns how the organizations plan and implement activities. Previous chapters have shown that internationals train local partners on how to carry out advocacy campaigns (Sara, Chapter 3), civil society networking (Carrie, Chapter 3), or meetings with public officials (Sara, again). Local partners get coached on how to narrate their work balancing between personal stories (including emotional hints of activism or personal liberation to convey authenticity), technical jargon, and political buzzwords to convince the international policymakers that desire this account (Monica, and Elsa, Chapter 3). In addition, INGOs train partners to conduct participatory projects (Carrie, Chapter 3), or indeed to understand what “projects” are at all in donor logic. Meanwhile, INGOs rarely draw on partners’ experiences or team up with them to learn such things together, even when they also need it.

Here, I want to add an example of such a missed opportunity from my own experience. From around 2005 I was involved in reshaping the formats partners used to apply for projects and report back to our INGO. We worked to make these formats fit Logical Framework Approaches (LFA) to project planning, monitoring and evaluation (popular with donors). Partners would learn, we thought, to make a “logical” connection between their context analysis and their project. In other words, they would clarify what was wrong in their country and how they wanted to fix part of it. An additional advantage was that LFA emphasized participatory input from the stakeholders and beneficiaries affected by the project. Meanwhile, in those years our own organization went through several planning processes, with many staff frustrated and confused by the very same issues: what problems are we trying to fix and how can we get input

from stakeholders on how to do so. However, while we probably organized, financed, and followed up at least tens of trainings for partners, I never heard the suggestion that we could discuss with or learn from the partners that seemed more successful in using the method.

Despite being convinced that the LFA method would really help our partners, we did not reflect on what made our own organization so resistant to similar changes. This one-directional attention thus replicates and reinforces the colonial patterns of expertise, where the colonizers by definition know everything better than the colonized, even when they themselves fail to live up to it in practice. Again, the organizational layer of the invisibility cloak insulates internationals, not only from exposing their weaknesses, but also from potentially learning new things from and with partners, things which may have shaped a future path together.

Third, this unequal assessment of competence does not only concern routines and project implementation, but also overall organizational strategy. In this example, I visited a country office of the INGO (as head of field operations). At an informal dinner with some of the more internationally experienced partner representatives, they suggested that my INGO should create forms for formal input from partner organizations. They and other partners had valuable input to the strategic direction of our INGO which, after all, was created to support them. I remember nodding, while asking myself if they had considered all the bias that might enter the decision-making process if a few partner organizations influenced how we distribute resources between regions, themes and organizations. However, I did not ask them to discuss these questions, as doing so seemed to imply that they were not as competent as we were.

However, they planted a seed of doubt/possibility and as we were about to start planning for a new strategy, I raised the idea informally with a more senior colleague in the management group. That person brushed it off (without any emotional expression) and I left it there, thinking

that perhaps the time had not yet come. I did not raise a formal discussion, nor did I get back to the initiators. Our structures for accountability to (or even advice from) partner organizations thus remained off the partnership table, despite constantly providing capacity building for partners to become “democratic” civil society organizations.

My point is not that Northern and Southern organizations are in the same situation, suffer the same problems, or have the same resources to handle them. As Ackerly and True (2006, 246) say, feminist equality is not about sameness, but about “an absence of hierarchy.” Instead, my points are the same as in the personal subsection: unequal attention and its colonial continuities. First, the attention is unequally distributed to the extreme that *everything* about local partner organizations is a legitimate topic for discussion (dissection) and (almost) nothing about INGOs is. This means that INGOs feel capable of producing useful opinions about everything partner-related, whereas the reverse is a source of surprise. This inequality shows up in exclamations that “*they could give us trainings!*” (Chapter 2).

Second, the unequal attention to the partners’ organizations shows a continuation of colonial relationships where one actor knows how things should work and therefore can stay comfortably out of sight while the other is dissected to be improved. It does not signal a common community encompassing INGOs and local partners, where organizational problems and strategies are shared mutually. Instead, the examples above demonstrated that hiding emotions like exhaustion, frustration, confusion, and doubt led to fewer opportunities to learn and develop shared alternatives for how to change things toward a new game.

In the everyday practices of INGOs supporting local civil society organizations, the unequal attention is perhaps most stark regarding organizational layer (which I picture as the

thickest), and most easily captured in the personal layer (the top gloss). However, underlying these is also a geopolitical layer, providing the basic warp which structures the others.

*C) Geopolitically*

While I so far have shown that INGO practices work to make internationals invisible within the partnership, that is, to keep them off the partnership table as persons and as organizations, here I add that that there is also a geopolitical layer of the invisibility cloak. What I mean is that INGO practices also make their Western home countries invisible as actors in the political dynamics of the conflicts that motivate INGOs' peacebuilding work. In other words, the armed conflicts are treated as local, national, or perhaps regional affairs located "over there" rather than entangled in international political and economic relations (Nordstrom 1997) where Western countries are the major players. I will point to two kinds of examples of how INGOs usually relate to governmental or intergovernmental institutions: who is (mainly) targeted by advocacy campaigns, and how they are so.

First, the institutions targeted by the activities financed by INGOs and discussed with partners are primarily their partners' governments in the Global South. It is these governments (or other official institutions) that are on the receiving end of the advocacy work partners carry out and constantly (mean to) improve through INGO capacity building efforts. Most of these advocacy activities are carried out by the partner organizations themselves without direct involvement of INGO staff. Instead, advocacy becomes a topic of partnership discussions through the constant back and forth on applications and reports of partner activities. Sara's story (Example 3, Chapter 3) about how their partners reached agreements on land rights is such an example, and she shared others about successful advocacy by partners for legislative changes where activities were funded by the INGO. That is, partners carry out advocacy toward their own governments and INGOs support them to do so.

Second, even when the INGOs' "home" government is targeted (directly or through organizations such as the EU) the purpose is almost always to influence official policy towards the country of the partner organizations (e.g. to influence Sweden's policy towards Somalia). Efforts also target thematic policies, such as aid volumes and peacebuilding prevention, etc. For example, in Chapter 3, we saw that partnership practices include preparing partners for EU regional or thematic hearings, exposing donor agencies to more of partners' daily activities, and influencing international frameworks to include more local actors. As a contrast, activities are rarely based on or directed toward international dynamics underlying and/or feeding into armed conflict. Such dynamics could include the asymmetric international economic order; the connections between overconsumption and environmental conflict drivers; or the many rounds of discussion about reform of the UN (particularly its Security Council) and the emerging order regarding humanitarian intervention/responsibility to protect (R2P). However, as focus is almost exclusively on the weaknesses of Southern governments and officials, these broader international issues are kept off the table and Northern-dominated institutions can take cover under the invisibility cloak.

That geopolitical invisibility is the norm is demonstrated by the taken-for-granted assumption that attention should be directed towards Southern governments. This is business as usual and keeps INGOs within their comfort zone.<sup>86</sup> While comfort is not an explicit motivation by INGOs, I will show by using two counter-examples, that it is a likely effect when carrying on practices as usual. While the comfort of commonsense practices is rarely noted (like a well-worn

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<sup>86</sup> Again, I want to clarify that I am not saying my interviewees support colonialism or are unaware of (or unconcerned with) broader patterns of inequality. It is quite possible that these are factors that motivated them to enter this kind of work from the beginning (Autessere (2014), Koddenbrock (2012), and Malkki (2015) all cite such motivations by interviewees). Whether broader issues were kept out of our conversations because practitioners think they are irrelevant to everyday tasks or thought *I* would think they were irrelevant matters less than the fact that they were not brought up. Either way, my interpretation is that you are not supposed to take broader issues into account as you go about peacebuilding as usual.

dress which fits comfortably) these two exceptions reveal that *breaking* the rules can cause discomfort and expose vulnerabilities.

The first counter-example is about challenges INGOs face when they start considering connections between their peacebuilding work “over there” and issues “over here.” At least two of the INGOs in my study were experimenting with how to relate social issues in their headquarter countries to their peacebuilding work. One interviewee, Marcos, describes what he calls “the interconnectedness” between these different spheres and how it changes the public perception of what INGOs do: “it’s no longer about, you know, being kind and generous and helping those people far away, who are suffering. It’s about dealing with problems which are more and more *our* problems too.” He points out that interconnectedness is becoming more visible through discourses which connect “migration” and “security,” or “trade” and “taking away our jobs”. As a consequence, INGOs are no longer seen as working with benign issues of “ethics and morality” but as part of the more contentious “field of interest and politics.” This shift involves challenges for INGOs.

More specifically, Marcos explains, “it becomes important not only to be able to operate */.../ away* from home, because the issues are *here* as well. And that creates an interesting challenge, because all of a sudden, you are...’testing what you do’ in a much more challenging way.” The test that Marcos is talking about is multidimensional and involves a tougher standard for what the INGO “can offer,” the competition with “a much stronger local civil society,” and a more sensitive relationship with their own government.

First, he points to the harder test put by the relatively richer context at “home.” Whereas “the needs [where INGOs usually work] are so high that no matter what you bring it will be well received [whereas] back home, there is a completely different way of looking at it.” I interpret

Marcos' observation as the INGO no longer having the privilege of their competence being taken for granted as "internationals." Instead, by moving "back home," their competence is put under scrutiny. Acting at "home" also places the INGO in a competitive position in relation to other civil society organizations. In Western democracies, such organizations "have a long history, [and] are very legitimate, because they are based on volunteering in the communities," unlike INGOs who are professionalized and usually working far "away." Finally, bringing up the interconnectedness of issues can be sensitive as "these are things people are considering when they vote now." In other words, it can both bring public scrutiny to the INGO and make their relations with the government more tense.

Indeed, this risk is also one of the advantages of connecting contexts in Marcos' view: he wants to bring up publicly the contradictions in foreign policy that the INGO can experience "over there," and to "say things that governments and states find it harder to say." Still, doing so risks the INGO's government funding for peacebuilding work. Marcos' atypical discussion shows both that highlighting "interconnectedness" breaks with business as usual and immediately puts internationals in the spotlight geopolitically (and organizationally). In addition, it highlights the risks in losing this layer of invisibility, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the second counter-example, partners were called upon as experts of themes relevant to the society of the North. A few years ago, the INGO I worked for organized an event about increasing nationalism in its home country, inviting Balkan partners to be on the panel. Partners were called on as experts based on their anti-nationalist activism. They had experience since before the 1990s' wars and had often tackled violent resistance and public slander. I remember talking excitedly with one colleague about our unusual move, but also wondering whether the audience would take us seriously. Perhaps they would think that we were fear-mongering,



suggesting that our country now was as dangerous as the Balkans then. Such occasions where partners are experts on Northern problems are rare. The more common situation is that the Northern home countries of INGOs are (or have) resources for solutions to any problem in Southern countries, not that they have problems that actors from the South can contribute to. In other words, everyday practices of INGOs allow the politics of their home countries to stay invisible within the partnership, just as they make invisible the politics of their organizations and their personal lives.

My point is not that INGOs should stop supporting advocacy towards partners' governments, that they are unaware of systemic inequalities, or that every organization should work on every issue. Instead, my first point is simply that INGOs' everyday practices work to orient them to peacebuilding problems being "over there." Consequently, wider global asymmetries and the prominent roles, policies, and ways of life of the privileged Northern countries in this order are left invisible, rather than brought up for discussion within the partnerships. While INGOs assume they know the partners' political context well enough to give advice or pose valuable questions,<sup>87</sup> the reverse is not usually the case, revealing the colonial continuities. My second point is that when INGOs make exceptions that break or reverse these rules, they make themselves vulnerable. The exceptions expose weaknesses in their own organizations and limitations to their own knowledge, and their future becomes increasingly uncertain. This illustrates the stakes in keeping the underlying geopolitical layer of the invisibility cloak intact.

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<sup>87</sup> For sure, critical scholars have long pointed out the lack of knowledge about the local context in many INGOs (and many INGOs' agree, and hire and promote locally employed staff). However, my point is the asymmetrical positioning rather than the need for internationals to achieve a particular level of "local" knowledge.

#### *D) Section conclusion*

In this section I have investigated how INGO practices together patch up the invisibility cloak that hides peacebuilding internationals in three layers: personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. For each layer I have shown that INGO practices routinely involve an unequal orientation, where attention is almost completely directed only from INGOs toward their local partners. In addition, I have shown that ignoring emotions aligns with colonial patterns where the privileged actor keeps its superior status as a competent player, as rationality is assumed to be contrary to emotionality. Other advantages of wearing the invisibility cloak include the comfort of certainty and being able to carry on as before. Exceptions have demonstrated the emotional risks involved in breaking the rules, even for an internal discussion or a single event, which prompts INGOs to stay under the cloak and keep the benefits of invisibility. However, these benefits allow fewer possibilities to learn concrete skills and understand underlying conditions of the peacebuilding field, and thus leave INGOs with fewer tools to change the game.

This section has thus shown that peacebuilding INGOs are hindered in their receptive listening by wearing a multi-layered invisibility cloak. However, despite the growing importance of civil society actors in peacebuilding, INGOs still make up a small part of international players in the field. In the next section, I therefore zoom out to examine the reach of the invisibility cloak to other international actors in peacebuilding.

## **2. The reach of the invisibility cloak: the international peacebuilding Subject**

“I can understand it for our country team, it’s their country /.../ but for expats like us, [feeling something] ... seems a bit full of ourselves, no?”

*Donor interviewee*

“[Unlike INGOs] We’re not trying to change anything concrete in the field”

*Researcher interviewee*

These quotes from interviews with a peacebuilding donor and a peace researcher respectively express the interviewees' desire to distance themselves from the contexts of the local partners that they are working with. The donor interviewee cited above, for example, added that "I do a job" which is "very lucrative" but not about "the greater good." Yet, s/he spent two hours with me, lining up examples of proud moments of achievements, of frustration with wasteful practices of internationals, and of passionate engagement in measurable impact on people's lives. As the interview ended s/he nodded at my phone which recorded our conversation and half-joked: "that's not going to come back and haunt me, right?" I joked back, saying "It will, at night, but hopefully not through any data leak." S/he laughed a little and then added, quietly: "no, but it does, at night." Yet, s/he found feeling for his/her job to be "a bit full of ourselves, no?" Such quotes indicate that not only INGOs take comfort under an invisibility cloak, but that invisibility is a characteristic of international partnership practices in the peacebuilding field writ large.

If my findings from zooming in on emotional aspects of partnership practices (in Chapters 2 and 3) were only attributable to three INGOs, the significance would be minimal. Therefore, this section asks about the reach of the invisibility cloak in peacebuilding, its significance as a marker of competence beyond the INGO circle. Competence is assessed relationally, in relation to other actors in the field, which is why I have also conducted interviews with donors and peace researchers.<sup>88</sup> Through these interviews, I find that international peacebuilding actors across professional positions share similar (emotional) practices based on similar conditions. Therefore, I suggest that the invisibility cloak is a common wardrobe staple to

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<sup>88</sup> They were interviewed as individuals in the peacebuilding field, working (at the moment) for donor and research institutions respectively, not to represent those institutions officially. While there are also private foundations and other actors who fund peacebuilding projects, for this project, I focused on donor institutions that were governmental or intergovernmental aid agencies.

signal peacebuilding competence for internationals. In other words, I claim that invisibility is a shared characteristic of the international Subject in the peacebuilding field. The extensive reach of the invisibility cloak does not only help explain the overall puzzle of internationals' bad listening, but also poses challenges. The wider the reach, the harder to change the cloak, toward practices more likely to contribute to a (more) equal game and receptive listening. The possibilities for change will be explored in the last two sections of the chapter.

*A) Donors*

Not one of my INGO interviews ended without donors being mentioned. Donors seem omnipresent, yet, in this section I aim to show that the invisibility cloak also covers them. As we have seen in previous chapters, INGOs talk about how donors distribute money, define added value and desirable results from partnerships, design application and report formats, and structure the timing of projects over phases and the calendar year. Through such techniques, donors powerfully influence the most minute details of INGOs' daily work.

Often when I asked practitioners to walk me through a "normal day," the first thing they mentioned would be something related to a donor. Examples included answering e-mails about reports – to/from donors directly or discussing how partner reports could satisfy donor requirements; organizing a visit for, with, or to donor representatives; having meetings on skype or face to face to discuss forthcoming or past projects; providing input to donors' thematic strategies or publications; participating on outreach panels organized by or for donors; and even going to events with potential funders that could make the INGO less dependent on their main institutional donors. These and many other activities relate to explicit or implicit donor demands and aim to initiate or improve donor relations. Thus, that donors are major players, exerting influence on whether INGOs are considered competent peacebuilders is obvious and why I included interviews with donors to get their perspectives on INGO partnerships.

However, throughout my donor interviews, I quickly realized that our conversations were as much about donors themselves. To start us off I would ask similar questions as to INGOs about why my interviewees (had) wanted to work for this donor, how they got to their present position, and what their job meant in everyday terms. In analyzing their responses, similar patterns as in the INGO interviews emerged, with different nuances. Here, I give three examples of donor practices. They loosely follow the chapter structure, starting with negative emotions, moving to positive ones, and ending with reflections on how interviewees talk about peacebuilding relationships. Together, these examples suggest that donors share orientation to peacebuilding with INGOs, sharing cover under the invisibility cloak.

### Sharing tensions

First, donors experience similar tensions of juggling contradictions as INGOs. As an example, they talk about contradictory demands on their time and attention much like the authenticity contradiction (Chapter 2) that INGOs experience. The authenticity contradiction labels INGOs' dilemma as torn between being authentically professional and authentically grassroots. That is, they struggle to both produce all the documents that donors demand to approve funding and spend enough time together with partners. Similarly, donors are torn between increasing administration and staying close to "the field."

On the one hand, donors must spend more and more energy handling and justifying the increasing documentation (of finances, policies, routines, and activities) that they demand from INGOs and other partners.<sup>89</sup> My donor interviewees justify these higher demands by referring to the general public and its perceived need for extensive audit procedures to know its tax money is being used properly. Interviewees readily acknowledge that they barely (or not at all) can read all

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<sup>89</sup> Note that to donors, "partners" can be INGOs as well as local actors from civil society or governmental institutions depending on that person's "portfolio."

the documents they demand from INGOs (as suspected by one INGO interviewee cited in Chapter 2). However, not having time to read the documents does not seem to make these unnecessary. Instead of reading them, donor staff spend a lot of time and attention on how to systematize and store the information to make it available for potential future uses. The imagined users are future colleagues, evaluators, or even the general public itself who may want to follow-up on tax money. When I asked what this work means in an ordinary process, one interviewee describes how s/he prepares a decision to support a partner. I quote him/her at length to show how it echoes the pressures of administrative demands described by INGOs in Chapter 2:

“Preparing decisions means that ”of course, I’m filling in a lot of different [forms with] questions...[I also] take in documents from partners, read them, take in additional information [small laugh], I go to a kind of quality assurance committee, colleagues, discuss, enter additional information, go back to the system, update it, take in *more* documentation from partners, go to a controller, check formalities and [do] risk assessments, budget assessments and those kinds of questions, then you...go back again [laughs], you go to your boss and the same thing can happen there, that there are still things, so yeah, it’s ...[long pause]. *Hopefully* you meet with partners during this period, but that’s not always the case. And yeah, you negotiate agreements, maybe you involve the legal team...[continues to explain further steps]”

Even though this interviewee answers “hm, yes, I think so, at least most of the time” to my question if all these steps are meaningful, s/he also concedes that it has “gone a bit too far.” It is noteworthy that partner meetings still are desired, despite all the activities to gather information, yet only “hopefully” happen. To me, it illustrates that donors, to be competent, must prioritize administrative procedures which are less helpful in their substantive work assessing and deciding about peacebuilding projects.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The increasing demands for such procedures are part of the broader neoliberalization of the field and New Public Management agendas of the past decades. See literature on audit cultures, referenced in Chapter 2.

In another example, a donor interviewee told me in a soft voice but between clenched teeth about a recent change of consultants they used for context analyses. My interviewee had been ordered to stop using a “local” consultant, even though this person could travel freely where foreigners rarely went and spoke several relevant languages. However, the consultant was not so proficient in writing policy documents in English, so my interviewee had basically translated the drafts into required jargon. A new manager demanded a change to “expatriates” who flew in for a few weeks and quickly produced well-written reports to a much higher rate, a decision my interviewee questioned. Taking silent breaks after almost every sentence, pressing his/her lips together, and sighing before continuing, s/he recalled the manager’s answer: “we have to realize it is much more for us to be able to tell our [stakeholders] rather than actually helping the program.” Many donor employees share such frustration with INGOs over expensive and extensive documentation which is not deemed helpful.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, despite the massive demands on detailed documentation of the projects, almost all donor interviewees expressed a desire for “going out into reality.” They talked, often longingly, about the rare satisfaction of visiting partners “in the field,” “on the ground,” “where the action is,” etc. If you are not placed “in the field,” traveling there is deemed very important to understand the context and your own potential role. One interviewee even said that going “out” is “the most important” – and even so acknowledged that it was a struggle for him/her to make time for visits every year. When I asked why traveling is so important, given all the information donors demand and discuss in meetings with grantees, s/he answered, “you can get a feel [rubbing thumb against index finger] for what’s actually going on.” Another interviewee described the value as making personal contacts and observing partners interacting

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<sup>91</sup> Note that there are contradictory examples, as Chapter 2 also reports a donor interviewee saying they prefer a rougher report directly from local partners as it contains more information than the smoother writing of INGOs.

with each other. S/he explained: “it’s not always about talking so much. Just being in the room means I can pick up on things that are going on and that I can share when I come back [to HQ].” That is, donors value “getting a feel” for “what’s actually going on” and therefore desire to meet partners or have frequent informal contact where they can “pick up” important information.

However, what donors “pick up” is for internal use as much as (or more than) for discussions with partners directly. In addition, while reports are increasing in number and detail, visits are made if and when possible, signaling decreasing priority. Being a competent donor, in practice thus seems to mean knowing more *about* their partners rather than knowing the partners. Practically, it means documenting and following up on partners’ activities and progress to the extent that that documentation itself becomes more important than the practical feel and direct contacts. In this, donors share with INGOs the tensions of juggling contradictions, such as that between administrative demands and being “out there.”

#### Sharing positive emotions

Second, donors and INGOs also share positive emotions in relation to a number of (other) practices. For example, several donor interviewees told me about “good examples” in which they were proud of results that fitted their practical sense of what mattered, even when these results were not easily categorized in terms of project matrices. For example, one interviewee told me at length about an innovative program which had prioritized an open-ended agenda and an intensely cooperative approach with another donor institution and several civil society actors. However, when wrapping up to summarize results, s/he hesitated and said, “[s]o, what are the lessons learned, what has this led to? [Pause.] Well, it’s hard to say...” and then s/he mentioned strengthened relations with the other donor institution and that civil society actors had mentioned



“both plusses and minuses” in the evaluation. Good results are thus not necessarily connected to measurables, even for donors.

In addition, several interviewees expressed a sense of responsibility towards INGOs, connected to practices of buffering their own institution’s demands. One way of buffering was to push for longer agreements to provide “flexibility” for INGOs. When they explained how they maneuvered such buffering within the formal system, interviewees referred to their own experience and their own interpretations of aid effectiveness principles. This explanation signals that whereas lower-status actors’ adjustments are signs they are still developing (or worse, are untrustworthy), for higher-status actors it shows practical excellence that justifies bending and interpreting the rules creatively. Donors thus share with INGOs practices that reinforce the hierarchical old game where their competence is taken for granted (competence means power which means competence) and their practices are kept off the table, invisible in the partnership.

#### Talking about peacebuilding relations

Third, donors and INGOs share ways of expressing themselves regarding peacebuilding relations between different type of actors, indicating a shared approach to competence and what matters in the field. For example, just as an INGO practitioner (in Chapter 2) noted that “we say partners, they say donors,” donors do indeed call INGOs partners whereas the opposite is rarely the case. Another common image is that of the “chain” of peacebuilding (especially in relation to funding) which stretches from the central actors and towards the periphery who are “out there.” The chain signals a center in the North/West; this is where funding originates and moves from, through increasingly lower-status actors to local grassroot groups, who are “all the way out.”

This asymmetry in control seems reflected in (language of) emotional intensity. For example, donors’ different position in the field (compared to INGOs) meant they seemed to have

more control over their daily time-schedule. In terms of daily stress, I saw INGO practitioners who suddenly had to cancel a meeting or rush from a quick lunch in order to get to a meeting a donor had requested at short notice. In programming decisions donors talked about INGO delays as nuisances or signals of INGO incompetence, whereas donor delays are felt as near-death-experiences to INGO country programs (mentioned in Chapter 2).

These similarities in how emotions and other (aspects of) practices are connected and relations are talked about suggest donors and INGOs share subjectivities as internationals. Here, I have shown that the shared orientation is strengthened by the emotional (aspect of) practices. Emotions direct attention downwards or outwards in an imagined “chain” which has local actors at the outer end, and simultaneously away from themselves as part of the centrally placed “international.” In other words, donors’ ordinary practices make the international Subject invisible on the partnership agenda and keep it from appearing on the partnership table. Therefore, I think that the invisibility cloak covers donors as well as INGOs. In the following subsection, I examine whether the cloak reaches even further, to also cover peace researchers.

### *B) Peace researchers*

While not one of my INGO interviews ended without talking about donors, only a few mentioned peace researchers.<sup>92</sup> Peace researchers seem irrelevant to INGOs’ everyday,<sup>93</sup> yet in this subsection I aim to show that the two groups indeed share practices as internationals – and

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<sup>92</sup> Here, I use a broad definition of peace research, including studies of peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peacemaking, war and conflict studies, etc. Also, here I focus on “international” peace researchers, with which I generally mean researchers from the North and based there (unless specified otherwise). However, I also interviewed researchers from the North and based in the South, and researchers from the South and based either in the South or (previously or presently) in the North. While researcher interviewees in the North were based at universities, those in the South were based at a mix of universities and research institutes, think-tanks or INGOs, or freelancing as researchers on and off, sometimes by choice, sometimes reflecting the more precarious research funding in the South.

<sup>93</sup> I do not interpret this absence as practitioners’ lack of awareness for two reasons. First, most of my interviewees (I did not ask systematically) had university degrees (sometimes several, sometimes PhDs), usually in social sciences, and should know peace research exists. Second, all three organizations included in the study have as part of their mission to produce research of their own, publishing thematic and regional reports on peacebuilding issues.

thereby share cover underneath a common invisibility cloak. As with donors, I wanted to include interviews with peace researchers to get an outside perspective on INGO partnerships with local actors. I particularly sought the expertise of local(ly based) researchers. However, as with donors, it quickly became clear that my conversations with international researchers contained many of the same patterns as those with INGOs. More specifically, the interviews indicated that peace researchers are in similar positions in relation to local actors, whether these are researched groups or research partners. Therefore, I decided to include these interviews as data, along with additional observations from my own academic studies and experiences.<sup>94</sup>

Widening the study this way enables me to broaden my claim to suggest that the invisibility cloak reaches beyond both INGOs and donors to cover peace researchers as well. That is, I suggest that invisibility constitutes a general condition of the international Subject (as opposed to object) of peacebuilding. This Subject makes itself invisible through practices which direct all attention toward the local actors and away from the international. This shared international orientation reproduces existing “old-game” hierarchies of the field and makes receptive listening by internationals to local actors less likely in general.

Below, I give three examples of how peace researchers share emotional practices and thereby the invisibility cloak with INGOs, even though I note some variations in forms and emphasis. In an attempt to reflect practices throughout the research process. I start with researchers’ sense of having a right to go to “the field” at all; then move to what I call their tense satisfaction in bringing complementary knowledge together; and end with the need for results, in the forms of general knowledge as well as scientific publications.

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<sup>94</sup> Observations include both undergraduate and graduate level, regular course work, informal workshops and seminars, as well as international conferences and summer schools, from three departments in three countries: Sweden, the UK, and the USA. (Not to suggest observations are a representative sample, only that they are not particular to one geographic or institutional context.)

### The sense of having a right to research in and on “the field”

The first shared orientation between INGOs and peace researchers is their sense of having a right to go to the field in the first place. Unlike INGOs though, according to my interviewee cited above, researchers do not aim to “improve anything concrete.” That is, while the local population is supposed to get something out of INGO engagement, this is not the case with research. That researchers themselves aim to get something from the field, however, is clear as soon as they start planning “fieldwork.” A recent methods book aiming to encourage more field research in political science<sup>95</sup> defines fieldwork as when a researcher is “leaving one’s home institution in order to acquire data, information or insights” (Kapiszewski et al. 2015). In other words, the definition explicitly treats the data that one goes out “to acquire” as if they are already there for you to harvest rather than generated by the researchers’ need and through the research practices mandated by “one’s home institution.” The view of fieldwork as separate thus makes the needs and practices used by the international to demonstrate competence as a person and as an institution invisible to the research interaction. This separation of researchers and their home institutions from the researched field comes with a hierarchical view of the two spheres.

The “field” is not only separated from Northern research institutions location, but also placed lower in status (Richmond et al. 2015). For example, the most common assumption I encountered for my “fieldwork” was that I was going to a country in the South. Being based in Sweden was often treated as a joke or as cheating, as if I was trying to get credit for roughing it in the field while actually cushioned by a welfare state. I often encountered raised eyebrows,

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<sup>95</sup> Many observations here may be discipline-specific, given the much older discussion in anthropology about problematic colonial baggage in science, see for example Lewis (1973) and Uddin (2011). In political science/ IR, the movement to “decolonize” the discipline has for example been discussed in Gruffydd Jones (2006) and in the more recent trilogy on “worlding” IR (Tickner and Wæver 2009; Tickner and Blaney 2012, 2013). For a recent peace research article which problematizes the use of “field,” see Richmond et al. (2015).

laughter, skepticism, and explicit questioning. Usually, researchers would be more accepting of my use of the term “fieldwork” once I admitted I also traveled to the Balkans and East Africa. These Southern<sup>96</sup> places are easily accepted as “fields” where things are being cultivated rather than already matured, as in Northern locations. Therefore, it makes sense to go study how things are going and make recommendations for more effective crops or outcomes “over there.”

Consequently, in discussions of ethics, researchers often made several assumptions. These included that the people I would study would be below my status, rather than potentially deciding on my future career prospects; that I had no relation to them and would have none afterwards, rather than being actual and potential colleagues; and that it was up to me to make my research “available” to the “researched,” rather than them being able to look it up on the internet and to understand it. This “separate and unequal” way of thinking of researchers “here” in the North as going out into “the field” in the South where puzzling problems are located, closely resembles the donor and INGO use of the image of the “chain.” It is not difficult to see a continuation of the colonial patterns, something which is further reinforced by the extractive language used.

The extractive approach to “the field” reinforces the right of Northern-based researchers to do fieldwork in the South, to use a common phrase, to “get the data.” The desire to “get the data” is perhaps where researchers’ distinguish themselves most from INGOs’ sense of a right to go to the field, as INGOs indeed refer to themselves as there to “improve [some]thing concrete.” For researchers, getting the data often trumps other concerns, including ethical ones (as long as one passes the mandated ethics review). Taking part in several summer schools and methods workshops geared towards PhD-students doing “fieldwork” (implied in Southern countries), I

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<sup>96</sup> For the Balkans as the European “other,” see Todorova (2009).

participated in discussions where researchers were analogous to gold miners and the population in the field either obstacles to or instruments for extraction of the coveted data gold. Even when these discussions were informed by critical concerns such as unequal economic or political power, senior and junior researchers alike would often put researcher concerns above and beyond those of the researched. Anxieties of not meeting tight deadlines for funding (whether for dissertations or post-doctoral projects) can, for example, motivate paying interviewees (symbolically or substantially), learning a few words of the local language, wearing something local, generally being polite and attentive, hiring translators/assistants without considering labor laws, or even lying about (or trying to hide) one's ethnic identity lest one be judged as partial to the "other side" of a conflict line. While thoughtful and balanced input was also shared at such occasions, senior staff or faculty are often absent or passive rather than putting the need to get pre-defined data into perspective. Such perspectives could be larger social issues rather than an individual's dissertation, or how to conclude and learn from a research project even when the originally planned data were not possible to generate.

Instead, the researcher's need to get the data is treated as a set and given condition that is not put on the table for discussion as a part of the research project – neither among researchers nor between researchers and the researched. Instead of approaching the researched receptively, strategies honed "at one's home institution" are often about hearing data that fit in the pre-defined formats, making it less likely to hear something unexpected once researchers do go to "the field."

#### Tense satisfaction in complementary knowledges

While the previous paragraphs have shown that the right to go to "the field" is often connected to Northern researchers' terminology of separation, hierarchy, and extraction, the

following show there is also a sense of satisfaction in bringing complementary knowledges together. While I interpreted INGOs' talk of complementary capacities as tensely balancing between saying partners have yet still need crucial capacity, I also found moments of excitement partners were so competent "*they could give us trainings!*" For researchers, the complementarity of international and local knowledges seems more unproblematic and they express satisfaction at bringing them together. However, there were also tensions which came out in jokes and comparisons which reveal that complementarity can be quite complicated.

The satisfaction of bringing complementary knowledges together was evident in examples from projects where Northern and Southern researchers cooperate and can meet as colleagues. For example, one interviewee called,

"the *core* or heart of peace research that we cooperate with partners who are local experts, who know everything about history, and meaning, and the conflict, about everything that is important for that location, and we come with other expertise, and then we put it together and *then* we can get something which is important."

However, complementarity can be equally problematic in replicating colonial patterns, which researchers often are aware about. This is illustrated by a joke one interviewee made, only to quickly and forcefully take it back.

When I asked "so, in this cooperation [with a Southern research institute], what's the idea of what each actor brings?" s/he first answered in a mock-pompous tone "So, we bring *Knowledge.*" And then s/he quickly added, "no, no, I'm joking. That was a *joke*. You can absolutely not write that down, that's not what I think."<sup>97</sup> The forceful retraction signals that the researcher thought it was very important that I understood that s/he was aware of colonial stereotypes. The cooperation in question was brought up because I asked for good examples.

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<sup>97</sup> When writing up, I asked the interviewee for permission to use this particular example, which s/he granted.

Despite knowing the stereotypes, as shown by the joke, when s/he then describes the project in more detail, it actually follows well-established, old-game patterns: there is capacity building from North to South; the former stand for knowledge in universally recognized theory and methods; the latter contribute invaluable knowledge of the local culture which enables interpretation of the results. S/he is aware of the asymmetry, and, in my interpretation, wants to emphasize the rational (rather than colonial) logic of this division. Therefore, s/he draws a parallel between the development of his/her own department and Southern research institutes.

By using his/her own Northern research department's trajectory as an example for how Southern research institutes can develop, in my interpretation, the peace researcher means to reject fixed hierarchies between the two, but instead ends up reinforcing them. To explain, I share some details of his/her example, which uses the analogy of Southern countries as raw material producers for refining industries located in the North. My interviewee thought that his/her department a decade ago largely functioned as a raw material producer for other researchers by publishing data. S/he described how the rise towards more refined output (academic publications) was achieved by a slow and strategic concerted effort by the department, which Southern research institutes must replicate to rise similarly.

While his/her story illustrates intentional rejection of the old game and willingness to embrace a new game of equal treatment of Southern research colleagues, it also reproduces old game patterns. Making the different rankings between research institutes in the North and South only about circumstances is problematic for at least two reasons. First, setting up the difference this way ignores the colonial history of exploitation that forced the Southern institutes into a lower position, and the remaining structures that keep them there.<sup>98</sup> Second, the idea of a

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<sup>98</sup> See Gruffydd Jones 2006, Conclusion, for a discussion of how international economic structures have depleted African research resources and continue to do so.



universal and linear trajectory implies that there is one uniform standard for competence. Such a standard ignores the fact that his/her institution is in the North and thus more likely to be deemed competent to both fulfil and set such standards, while Southern actors are more acceptable *as* data (as the above discussion on the field shows). Disregarding rather than openly acknowledging actual histories thus makes present geopolitical inequalities invisible.

### The need for results

Peace researchers also share with INGOs the need for pre-determined results. While for INGOs such results are often measurables laid out in project proposals, research results range from general knowledge to concrete publications. Just like INGOs' need for results orient their attention toward their local partners as the material to be improved, researchers pay attention to the actors they research as data. However, just like INGOs usually keep their own work and challenges outside of their partnerships, researchers rarely consider the researched as relevant partners for conversations about the knowledge they are part of producing or about their methods for doing so.<sup>99</sup> In addition, the pressures to publish academically create tensions with research intentions for (more) equal cooperation with researchers from the South.

In other words, the unequal status between researcher and researched remains after the research, as it is unusual for researchers to discuss their analysis with the people they research. Instead, the societal impact is usually motivated by referring to the possibility that (Western) policymakers may pick up the conclusions. The researcher cited at the beginning of the section was very clear that “nothing will change for the population.” While this was said to acknowledge limitations of the research, it also illustrates that research practices often make researchers

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<sup>99</sup> For a recent discussion of how researchers in political theory can engage with activists as theoretical interlocutors, see Leebaw (2017), who draws on Sonali Chakravarti and Farah Godrej as well as on fieldwork in South Africa to discuss the challenges of listening as a political theorist in particular and a scholar in general.

invisible after the data generating phase of the project.<sup>100</sup> As a hopeful sign, however, some interviewees mentioned a growing resolve to communicate more broadly about the research (at least to inform about the results), including to groups included in the research process.

In addition to the way the knowledge generated was shared, there were several asymmetrical examples of sharing the concrete gold standard of researcher results: publication, publication, publication – as is the often recurring mantra in academia. Just like for INGOs, the indicators preferred (by funders) are often easily measurable rather than perceived as generally meaningful. While INGO examples of such indicators included “agreements signed,” or “laws changed,” for researchers, the most important success indicator is publication, preferably peer-reviewed articles in academic journals. But just like INGOs’ need to fulfil pre-defined indicators can create obstacles for their receptive listening to local partners, researchers’ need to demonstrate success by publication can get in the way of listening to unexpected or uncomfortable input from local research partners.

In one example, my interviewee described at length the many measures to equalize cooperation with a Southern research partner. However, at one point s/he started wriggling in his/her seat and hesitated to speak, clearly awkward about the next sentence, which expressed frustration with the partner’s reaction to all these measures. When I asked what the partner thought, s/he answered that they demanded to be included equally in all publication credit and “even wanted it to be included in the budget, they wanted to *get paid* to write things and we saw it more as ‘this is something you get by goodwill,’ to use the data from the project. /.../ there, we felt that they...almost demanded [quick, embarrassed laugh] *too much*.” The quotes show how my interviewee is torn by contradictions between equality and hierarchy.

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<sup>100</sup> Thanks to Tiffany Williams for this point.

My interviewee is clearly aware of the contradictions, as s/he continues “sure, it’s a bit double-edged, we want it to be a cooperative project, but of course we still want a *little* bit of a head start to write up our data.” There are several reasons s/he thinks that his/her institution deserves more publication rights than the Southern partner: they took the initiative, spent more time, and administer all the funding, which is also from a Northern research funder. In addition, they had to “explain” to the partner “what is expected, what is normal” both according to the funder (of “one hundred percent” of the costs) and to his/her university whose “legal team” had their say on “intellectual property.” Together, these motivations and his/her description makes this simultaneously an example of business as usual and a counter-example.

As an example of business as usual, the story shows that the motivations all replicate existing hierarchies and publication is seen as an “intellectual property” generated by the research project,<sup>101</sup> particularly by the initiative and the funding from the North. However, it is a counter-example in the way the project has attempted to create (more) equal cooperation – and thus led to the discomfort that makes the researcher wriggle, laugh embarrassedly, and hesitate when these efforts do not translate into a straight-forward success story. Instead, they lead to awkward discussions where partners “almost demanded *too much*,” which had to be returned to “what is normal” by involving the legal team and explaining intellectual property.

As a counter-example, however, the story also shows that when internationals do step away from “what is normal” they step into unknown territory, which is not necessarily an exhilarating adventure. More likely, it leads to awkward discussions and justifications which my interviewee described as “really difficult to say without sounding...” In this case, it also ended up with retreating to what is “normal” when it comes to publication credits. Organizationally,

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<sup>101</sup> In this situation, data is clearly seen as something “generated” by the research institution, creating an interesting tension with the stance of detachment between the field and the institution described above.

university departments need to have a good relationship with the funder, and personally, researchers need publications for their promotion evaluations, but these needs were not part of the set-up of the cooperation project.

The pressure to publish is not always acknowledged this openly, however. In one interview, a Northern researcher based in the South lavished praise on the many local researchers and research assistants involved in a project. When I was curious about how they handled publication credits in such a collaborative project, s/he said, “we actually didn’t think about it in time.” Forgetting resulted in him/her and the other senior researcher (from the North) publishing academically. On consideration, s/he asserted that “if we had the time again, I’d do it totally differently [because] [i]t *does* matter to people, doesn’t it? [pause] It is important, and it’s well, it’s unjust.” This example illustrates the difference between the (unthinking) rule, and the (explicit) exception.

Sometimes there are also exceptions where researchers do share both publication credits and general findings in other formats. For example, one interviewee based in the South described how a research project interviewing people about their life-choices in the midst of conflict led to a number of strong personal narratives being recorded. Some of these were published journalistically, and the people who told them traveled around sharing their stories with many compatriots who got in touch to witness of the impact on their own decisions. Again, the exceptional nature of this story shows the underlying asymmetry, where internationals, here as researchers, make themselves unavailable for cross-hierarchy conversations with local actors, as researched or research partners. The needs of internationals are rarely put on the table between the researchers and the researched, or the Northern researchers and their Southern research cooperation partners.

Instead, these needs of Northern researchers are part of the boundaries of the research. Similar to how INGOs describe their relations to partners, as donors do toward INGO, Northern researchers describe their own attempts to push those boundaries as connected to positive emotions. On the contrary, when the more marginalized partner does the same kind of pushing this is connected to negative emotions. As I discuss later in this chapter, perhaps rather than positive or negative emotions, it is confusion and uncertainty that signal openings and possibilities for change.

*C) Section conclusion*

In this section on the reach of the invisibility cloak, I have suggested that not only INGOs are making themselves invisible through their everyday practices. Instead, my interviews with donors and peace researchers have revealed that the practices of these actors have similar effects. In other words, many aspects about the way these other international peacebuilding practitioners do and talk while going about their daily tasks also put obstacles in the way of hearing unexpected and perhaps uncomfortable input from local actors (whether as project partners, researched groups, or research cooperation partners). The examples have shown that, with variations, institutional donors and peace researchers share tensions, positive emotions, and ways of talking with INGOs. This suggests that the reach of the “invisibility cloak” identified as a marker for peacebuilding INGOs covers a wider international community and can help explain lack of international receptive listening in peacebuilding writ large.<sup>102</sup> In the following, I address the question of possibilities for change, to be able to answer the question in the chapter heading: can the Subject (learn to) listen?

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<sup>102</sup> My study thus aligns with and extends Autessere’s (2014) conclusion that the shared mundane practices of internationals justifies talking about an “international community” of peacebuilding practice, as well as Goetze’s (2017) investigation into the “peacebuilding sensibilities” which define the field.

### **3. Can the Subject change? Using reflexivity to break the illusion of competent reproduction**

Below, I ask what possibilities for change toward more listening we can identify by using a Bourdieusian approach. Such an approach treats practices as “competent performances” and prescribes reflexivity as a means to break the almost magic spell of unspoken social rules for what counts as competence. Competence is assessed socially, by groups of practitioners who are already dominant in the field and therefore do not have to articulate or justify its rules explicitly. As we have seen when investigating the invisibility cloak, even suggesting that personal, organizational, or geopolitical dimensions of the international Subject are relevant to the partnership can provoke animated (and negative) reactions by actors deemed “competent.” Therefore, it makes sense that Bourdieusian reflexivity involves dialogue across different social groups as a means to make their particular rules explicit and visible (Bourdieu 2000, 10), and thus possible to question and to change. Working through what such reflexivity and dialogue can mean in practices using Autessere’s (2014) description of her own entry into Peaceland, I identify some useful recommendations below.

However, I find practice approaches limited as they stop short of developing these useful lessons into means for understanding dynamics of change.<sup>103</sup> More specifically, I find that their commitment to *competence* as a criterion for practice keeps them stuck on reproduction rather than change. Therefore, in the final section of the chapter, I instead turn to scholars dealing more explicitly with emotions and other consequences connected with carrying out practices that are *failing* existing competence criteria. After all, failing the present criteria is necessary for, even the essence of changing the game.

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<sup>103</sup> As do other critics, see for example Duvall and Chowdhury (2011) and Wilcox (2017).

A) *The magic of illusio and competent reproduction*

In this subsection, I use the Bourdieusian concepts of the *illusio* and *habitus* to analyze how practitioners' need to demonstrate competence contribute to reproducing the old game, regardless of any intentions to bring a new game about. As my data, I use Autessere's description of her own entry into Peaceland. I do so because her account demonstrates the stakes and mechanisms for reproduction. It also helps in the following subsection to demonstrate the limits of practice approaches which focus on competent reproduction.

According to Bourdieu, a field is held together by its *illusio*, its stakes, that which matters to the players in a game. While board games and sports are explicit with the stakes, in social games such as peacebuilding, the *illusio*, what the players are trying to achieve, is often implicit to the players (as described throughout this dissertation). Being a competent player means you "just know" that something matters and something else is unimportant, based on your feel for the game. And whether you are competent or not is assessed socially, by other players within the game, who themselves are dependent on upholding the *illusio* to keep their position. Therefore, the *illusio* is more easily spotted from outside the field as that which seems silly (like a dance with no sound on tv), perhaps upsetting, or just incomprehensible. Simple examples include family taboos that *you just don't* mention a certain topic (but a guest might unknowingly bring it up), or cultural imperatives that *you just do* certain things (whereas doing so might be insulting somewhere else). That peacebuilding is indeed such a field with unspoken rules by which players assess each other is illustrated by Séverine Autessere (2014) in her description of her experience as a newcomer to the international community she calls *Peaceland*.

Autessere (2014, 1) opens her ethnography with a vivid account of mistakes she made as she entered her first meeting in the field (Kosovo) in Peaceland, including arriving unacceptably late and wearing a vest with her employer's logo. She relates how this failure to demonstrate

competence “for a few interminable moments [made her] the center of attention” (2014,1) in a such a way that she afterwards did her “best to assimilate into [her] new community” (2014, 2).

She describes this assimilation further:

“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 /.../ I became fluent in their language /.../ I also learned their dominant narratives /.../ I familiarized myself with the subtle hierarchy and the ritualized patterns of interaction /.../ Plus, I figured out which meetings started on time and what I was supposed to wear to them” (2014, 2).

In less than one page of the book, we thus get a clear illustration of how a field reproduces itself and uphold its rituals and power hierarchies while avoiding change through socialization of the Subject (in this case, Autessere) into its practices, habits, and narratives.

This Subject is not pre-given and unchangeable. Instead, as Autessere’s description illustrates, one’s disposition, or *habitus* in Bourdieu’s terminology, is shaped by one’s socialization into a particular position in the field at the same time as it reproduces the field’s logic. At the very end of her book, Autessere returns to her early period in Peaceland, stating:

“I was so concerned about fitting in that I did not question what it was that I was fitting in to. I was so eager to make a difference /.../ that I did not pause to reflect on the practices I followed while trying to accomplish this goal. It was not until I stepped outside of the expatriate bubble that I realized what an odd, self-contained community we interveners were” (2014, 273).

The quote shows how the desire to fit in to the (existing) game shapes the habitus to in turn shape one’s desires to fit with the goals of the game as it is.<sup>104</sup> This is what Bourdieu (1990, 57) has called the “magic of the social” which makes Subjects generally want what is possible given the position they already have in the field. Simply put, one wants to be deemed competent

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<sup>104</sup> However, it is more a question of simultaneous co-constitution of the habitus and its desires with its sense of the social game rather than the mechanistic causation (a affecting b to create c) this sentence makes it sound as.



by one's peers and as one becomes so, one loses the desire to change the criteria of competence. In other words, as the rules start to make sense to you, you start to make sense of the world through them.

In terms of this study, as internationals become competent, they also learn to hide themselves as actors, personally, organizationally, and geopolitically. That is, in order to become considered competent peacebuilding players, they need to wear the invisibility cloak. In the words of different interviewees and commentators already cited above, it's "not supposed to be about" them, we "don't care that they're tired" from their banal "office politics," there are wars raging and more important "structures [that] matter." I interpret these reactions against making internationals' emotions visible as part of the policing of existing rules in the field. Such reactions show internationals, like Autessere, how to assimilate and motivates them to work hard to do so, in order to avoid the kind of unwanted attention and negative reactions triggered by deviating. However, reactions like this do not help us understand more about change. Here we see that the Bourdieusian emphasis on competence does indeed lead to a focus on reproduction (as alleged by critics) rather than change.<sup>105</sup> Looking closer though, we see that Autessere's

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<sup>105</sup> The section on international subjectivities in Bliesemann de Guevara (2012) adds other examples of how analyzing the habitus' attachment to the game's *illusio* helps understand reproduction of the fields of peacebuilding and humanitarianism. For example, Bliesemann de Guevara and Goetze (2012, 199-200) find that interveners "cling to liberal interventions [despite their] everyday experiences with and awareness of the pitfalls of external statebuilding" because "the normative assumptions underpinning these interventions are deeply anchored in their habitus."

In the same volume, Koddenbrock demonstrates how peacebuilding and humanitarian interveners (deployed in the DRC) adjust their goals to what is possible given existing dynamics – even though they originally take the job to change these. In his words, "after some time, this moral idealism [that internationals start out with] seems to be superseded by a different core motivation for this work. In a sense, self-fulfilment becomes a new norm" (2012, 219). These examples show how becoming competent, that is, succeeding in an existing field, involves adjusting to the practices (widely defined) and goals of already successful players, which ultimately contributes to reproducing the logic and power structures of the field.

A third contribution in the volume, by Smirl (2012), underlines this point, by showing that even when internationals successfully adjust in the short-term, failing to do so in the long term (for example, by not being convinced that self-fulfilment can replace moral idealism as a goal) means they leave the field (in both senses) and thus do not contribute to changing it. For additional examples, see Goetze (2017).

quote also hints at the Bourdieusian recipe for breaking the spell, by “stepp[ing] outside the /.../ bubble” through reflexivity.

*B) Reflexivity as a means for breaking the spell: contributions and limitations*

At first glance, Bourdieusian reflexivity is a way for academics *as practitioners* of research to change what is considered competence in their field, but in this subsection I show that reflexivity also contains some lessons – and limitations – as a tool for other practitioners aiming for change. Bourdieu’s concern is that researchers who study a particular field must find a way to combine an outside perspective with the insider view of the players who are being researched. If researchers, on the one hand, are too blinded by the academic *illusio* that they are external observers, they risk projecting their own theoretical frameworks onto the players they are studying. If they immerse themselves in the game, on the other hand, they risk getting caught up in the unspoken rules of the dominant players. To Bourdieu, there is only one way for academics to move beyond both risks at the same time: by breaking the spell of their own *illusio* and making themselves visible as particular actors (rather than cling to the idea of being neutral external observers). Reflexivity, for Bourdieu, thus means making the position of the researcher herself visible and part of the investigation.

Making themselves visible helps researchers better understand their orientation to the game and how it shapes their account. Autessere’s ethnography of her own entry into Peaceland seems a prime example, as she generously shares her own background as a part of the international peacebuilding community she is studying. She includes unflattering details of her own mistakes, as well as declarations of her continuing engagement with the issues and people of Peaceland. Making herself and her position vis-à-vis the field visible in this way, helps the reader

situate her analysis.<sup>106</sup> It illustrates the dilemmas and dynamics practitioners struggle with to stay (deemed as) competent within “the expatriate bubble,” that is, the social field within which Autessere as a peacebuilding practitioner was assessed as competent or not.

Opening up for dialogue (about one’s research) between different social groups, as Autessere does by acknowledging the “bubble,” is Bourdieu’s key recommendation for how academics should practice reflexivity. More specifically, to tease out the many layers of one’s habitus, he recommends that academics engage in dialogue across different social boundaries. While dialogue with researchers from different social backgrounds can make visible particularities depending on class, gender, race, etc.; cross-disciplinary dialogue can make visible the effects of variations in traditions and trainings in methods, concepts, etc. He even recommends dialogue about the academic, or “scholastic” condition in general, as this is “the first and most determinant of all the social conditions” which shape an academic’s view (Bourdieu 2000, 12, all three quotes). (Therefore, it is noteworthy that he does not recommend dialogue with non-academics about this, but thinks it suffices to stay within academia.) Stepping outside of your own home turf, so to speak, to be confronted with players from different fields through dialogue, thus makes reflexivity a way to “make oneself more *attentive* and more *receptive* to practice as it is practiced” (Bourdieu 2000, 55, emphases added). In other words, Autessere is not only practicing reflexivity in her academic work by letting us know how she relates to the peacebuilding practitioners. In fact, when she “stepped out of the expatriate bubble” and moved to academia to discuss peacebuilding, she was already practicing reflexivity as a practitioner aiming for change.

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<sup>106</sup> It is also why I have, throughout this dissertation, included examples from my own positions as employed by one of the INGOs, and later as a PhD-student, with the aim that it will help the reader situate my interpretations.

At closer inspection then, Bourdieu's version of reflexivity can be applied to practitioners of other games than the academic one, even though its usefulness is limited by the fact that he and his followers stop short of developing this insight further.<sup>107</sup> His criticism of academics as blinded by their own *illusio* was not matched by faith in other practitioners' ability for reflexivity as a means toward change. Instead, he sometimes seems to dismiss their ability to reflect at all. In fact, he claims that "as soon as he reflects on his practice, /.../ the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice" (Bourdieu 1990, 91), as if no players except those in the academic game could handle two viewpoints at once. While reflexivity as cross-social dialogue can be a means to break the *illusio*, Bourdieusian practice approaches do not develop how explicitly challenging competence criteria (rather than accidentally failing them) can be a purposeful strategy for change. Neither do they discuss in-depth what the consequences are for those who do so. Therefore, I consider the neglect of failure a first limitation of Bourdieusian reflexivity in understanding internationals' possibilities to change their practices toward more receptive listening.

There are two additional aspects of Bourdieusian reflexivity that limit its use for understanding whether the Subject can (learn to) Listen, as the chapter heading asks: its disregard of power differences in the cross-social dialogues recommended, and its emphasis on verbal rather than embodied (including emotional) aspects of change. Note that, as with the first limitation, these other two are major aspects in Bourdieu's explanation of reproduction, but are left wayside when practice-based researchers turn to explain change.

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<sup>107</sup> Instead, Bourdieu almost ridiculed academics for not realizing that they were also practitioners and that "the cost of an effort of learning about others and their practice /.../ does not come without learning about oneself and one's own practice" (2000, 55).

The second limitation of reflexivity in dealing with change is that despite Bourdieu's emphasis on the field as made up by power struggles over what and whose competence should dominate, this struggle disappears in the cross-social dialogues he recommends. In other words, even though some players may stand to gain substantially if some competence criteria are substituted for others, the dialogue is expected to neutrally reveal the arbitrariness of criteria, rather than be an arena to fight for the ones that benefit you most. Vice versa, the players who are already in a privileged position are not expected to resent the loss of the privileges that may follow a change. We see this sudden disappearance of power considerations reflected in Autessere's concluding recommendations from her study. While she lists many concrete suggestions for changes, there is little reflection on who stands to gain or lose from such changes and therefore limited understanding of what those who try to implement them may face. This is the second limitation of Bourdieusian reflexivity. Instead, making internationals visible as actors in partnerships, while taking their privileged position explicitly into account, could mean explicating what losing the privilege of invisibility might mean to them.

The third, and perhaps most important limitation builds on Bourdieu's strong emphasis on the role of emotions and the body as mechanisms which reinforce existing power dynamics. As laid out in Chapter 1, he highlights "early experiences" (Bourdieu 1990, 54) as these teach us about our place in the world through emotional stakes and the lessons are "buried /.../ in the body" rather than explicated verbally (Bourdieu 2000, 167). A closer look at Autessere's account of her entry into Peaceland seems to confirm this emphasis on emotions. The first paragraph of her book, which vividly recalls her mistakes in that first meeting, ends with the following sentence: "*Mortified*, I *scurried* to the back of the room to find a seat (and *hide*)" (2014, 1,

emphases added). After telling us (as cited above) about her work to assimilate in Kosovo, she describes the process of “learning the ropes” (2014, 2) mainly in terms of *feeling* differently:

“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 /.../ I never again *felt* out of place /.../ I started to *feel* part of a transnational community /.../ I *felt* that I had become part of a new world: Peaceland” (2014, 2, emphases added).

However, despite her own experience, like other Bourdieusian practice scholars, she leaves emotions out of her explicit analysis.<sup>108</sup> Despite not making it into the analysis, emotions turn up throughout Autessere’s book, right through the very last paragraph, which I think provides clues for how the Subject could learn to listen.

Dedicating her last paragraph to those internationals who “actively oppose the narratives, practices, and habits that [she] had once so unwittingly embraced” (2014, 273), Autessere acknowledges that such actors who fail to “assimilate” to the rules make great efforts and bear great costs:

“They /.../ *develop strong stakes* in the future of their new countries /.../ They *do everything they can* to bridge the gap between expatriates and host communities. They *relentlessly fight* the daily intervention routines /.../ However, /.../ such dissenters face *strong resistance* from *their peers* [who] regularly *marginalize* and *ostracize* the few among them who challenge the norm. As a result, *change occurs very slowly*” (2014, 273-274, emphases added).

Despite this charged account of the dire emotional and social consequences of “relentlessly fight[ing]” the norms of one’s “peers” – and the recognition that it slows down change – Autessere illustrates the third limitation of practice approaches. By leaving emotions out of the equation, particularly emotions related to doing and being a “failed” player according

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<sup>108</sup> Autessere’s contradictory treatment of emotions mirrors how Bourdieu settles for reflexivity through “dialogue” even though he believes that change can never be achieved through “the language of consciousness [if ignoring] the inscription of social structures in bodies” (2000, 172).

to one's peers in the field, practice approaches stop short of helping us understand – or indeed, encourage – change.

*C) Section conclusion*

In sum, drawing on Bourdieusian practice approaches to address the chapter heading: “Can the Subject (learn to) Listen?” has brought forth both contributions and limitations of these approaches. Rather than directly talking about invisibility and the data from my own study, I have worked with Autessere's example of entering Peaceland to show reflexivity in use by practice scholars. The analysis has shown that there are at least three aspects of reflexivity that create contributions as well as limitations in understanding – and effecting – change: treating academics as practitioners who want change, power considerations, and embodiment.

The first contribution draws on Bourdieu's point that academics are in fact practitioners themselves and to change their own game (to make better research), they must break through its illu<sup>s</sup>io by using reflexivity (to make themselves visible) as a purposeful strategy. It alerts us to the potential of reflexivity as useful to other practitioners – such as peacebuilding internationals – working purposefully to change *their* game. The limitation is that Bourdieu and his followers generally treat mismatches between habitus and field as temporary accidents. They then show how such mismatches are corrected through socialization of the habitus to want and learn the values and practices in the field, or through influences on the habitus to leave the field. They do not deal with *purposeful failure* in the form of consciously working for change of the field and its rules, and the emotional consequences involved for those taking on the task.

The second contribution draws on Bourdieu's strong emphasis on the struggle for power and status as a major motivation for action in any field. It alerts us to pay attention to the power positions of different social groups involved in a game. The limitation is that Bourdieusian practice approaches do not consider power struggles as a part of reflexive dialogue. Doing so

would mean taking seriously not only what subordinate groups may gain by changed criteria for competence. It would also mean considering what privileged groups may lose, should they start failing the present, hierarchical game by changing their practices to fit (and bring about) a new, more equal one.

The third contribution draws on Bourdieu's strong insistence on the embodied, emotional aspects of how the players "learn the ropes" (to use Autessere's expression) of the game. It alerts us to the importance of emotions in reproducing existing power structures, even in the face of explicit ambitions for change as in Autessere's case. The limitation is that these insights on emotions are *only* conceived of as mechanisms in reproduction and left out when discussing change.<sup>109</sup> That is, reflexive dialogue is thought of as a way to change practices without considering emotional consequences; the insights on emotions do not carry over into the work and reflexivity needed for change.

To conclude this section by going back to the question in the chapter heading "Can the Subject (learn to) Listen?" my answer based on Bourdieusian practice approaches ends up as: "no, probably not..." I answer "no, probably not" because change means failing present competence criteria rather than fulfilling them, and because reflexivity does not help us consider the ubiquitous power struggles as continuous but treats the reflexive dialogue as suspending such struggles. Finally, I answer "no, probably not" because the Bourdieusian emphasis on dialogue clashes with its insights that talking is not enough to effect change, given the emotional investments inscribing the rules of the field into the actors' physical (and institutional) subjectivities.

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<sup>109</sup> Bourdieu does remark that, for actors aiming for social change, "making things explicit can help, [but] only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete's training, durably transform habitus" (2000, 172). However, this insight is rarely reflected in practice-based scholars' recommendations for change or evaluations of change efforts.



Therefore, in the following and final section of the chapter, I turn again to Sara Ahmed and other scholars, who deal more explicitly with purposeful change as failure, and with the emotional consequences of failing established norms. In doing so, I flip the insights of subordinate groups (and of work with them).<sup>110</sup> Doing so allows me to discuss the losses that relatively privileged actors, such as peacebuilding internationals, can expect to face by choosing to fail in order to change the rules of the game.

#### **4. Can the Subject change? Ahmed's "killjoy" purposefully fails to share happiness**

In this section, I address the question of whether the Subject can change by using feminist theories to come to a different, more hopeful but also more demanding answer than above. Specifically, I use Ahmed's (2017) figure of the feminist "killjoy" who purposefully works for change by rupturing the shared orientations (toward what is supposed to make you "happy") which make up the existing rules of the game. While I found above that Bourdieusian practice approaches do suggest paths for change (often overlooked by critics and proponents alike) in the form of reflexivity, I also found that such reflexivity stops short of taking three important aspects into account. First, choosing to work for change, by opening, unraveling, or even dropping the cloak and make yourself more visible, by definition means purposefully failing the present game. Second, failing means losing privileges one has enjoyed while deemed competent, that is, failing has consequences. Third, and most importantly, many of these consequences are emotional. In brief, I find that focusing on practices as *competent* performances makes it difficult to understand change, which is in essence about *failing* and its emotional consequences. For the second step of

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<sup>110</sup> Like many feminist scholars who have noted that marginalized groups "just in order to survive" often have a sharper view of the system which oppresses them (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 575), Bourdieu also acknowledges that "those who occupy awkward positions /.../ are more likely to bring to consciousness that which, for others, is taken for granted, because they are forced to keep watch on themselves and consciously correct the 'first movements' of a habitus that generates inappropriate or misplaced behaviours" (2000, 163).

the analysis, therefore, in this section I turn to approaches more attuned to actors failing the present game in order to change it. This proves useful to understand what confronts internationals who aim to drop (or at least loosen) the invisibility cloak.

Specifically, I again turn to Sara Ahmed, this time to her work on *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), which counters all three limitations identified in practice approaches. Ahmed builds on her earlier work (2006, 2014) on emotions as shared (social) orientations and emphasizes that doing differently means breaking that familiar feeling of “we” and becoming a “killjoy.” In the three subsections below, the analysis reveals the vulnerabilities, discomfort (even pain), and uncertainties that internationals can expect from “killjoying,” and respectively questioning the present game, the self (including collective selves), and the imagined future. Each subsection starts by drawing on Ahmed, then flips her focus on marginalized groups<sup>111</sup> to what relatively privileged actors may lose by purposefully failing (i.e. working for change) and ends by revisiting or adding data from my interviews to discuss peacebuilding internationals specifically. The purpose is to draw out what kinds of practices could lead to an affirmative answer to the chapter question “Can the Subject (Learn to) Listen?”

In other words, could internationals contribute to a new peacebuilding game where they are able to listen more receptively to their local partners? The tentative answer from the analysis is a three-fold “Yes, if...” That is, yes, internationals can probably (learn to) listen, if they are willing to fail, if they make efforts to deal with the emotions involved, and if they accept that change (of games, selves, and futures) is a *political* commitment without certain answers. In other words, perhaps the conclusion echoes old sayings like “you can’t look good trying,” the “magic of change happens outside your comfort zone,” and – as feminists will recognize – “the

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<sup>111</sup> She does make several references to privileged actors, but usually as a counter-point to the situation of marginalized actors.

emotional is political.” The conclusion is summarized in Chapter 5 which further develops the contributions of the dissertation; practically, methodologically, empirically, and theoretically.

A) *Failing the present game: becoming the killjoy, becoming vulnerable*

Ahmed

In this first subsection, I look beyond *illusio*, to Ahmed’s emphasis on the *shared emotional orientation* of players committed to a game, as it helps us to understand more of the vulnerability actors face when they question the existing rules. Feeling similar things as your peers in similar situations is part of being competent in a social game. Indeed, feeling comfortable together is what makes them your peers, what makes you all part of the same collective Subject. Remember how Autessere (2014, 2, both quotes) “felt out of place” before she started “feeling as part of a /.../ community,” the community of peacebuilding internationals inhabiting Peaceland. Ahmed (2017, 82) uses the image of a crowd moving in the same direction while getting off the subway, following the same line, implying they will reach the desired goal. As long as you go with the flow, sharing the sense of haste (not too fast, not too slow), you are part of the community and carried along by the crowd. However, as soon as you stop or change your pace or direction, you separate yourself out from the group and get in the way of others, you become an obstacle on their way to their goal, their joy, you become a killjoy.<sup>112</sup>

Flipping Ahmed – from the benefit of the doubt to doubting the benefits

Most of Ahmed’s work (as that of many critical theorists) is written from the perspective of actors who are marginalized and who have to make efforts to fit into the flows considered

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<sup>112</sup> If emotions help define where we begin and end as subjects (as discussed in Chapter 2), shared emotions help define the collective subjects. Invisibility then can become like a second skin to the collective international subject, and breaking that skin is like breaking the we, putting the selves (individual and collective) in danger.

mainstream.<sup>113</sup> For example, women of color repeatedly have to assert they belong in crowds of professors, men of color must work to look friendly, unthreatening (2017, 129-130), lest they be stopped, or even shot at while walking in white neighborhoods. Ahmed says marginalized actors thus may need *the benefit of the doubt* in order to pass as belonging. When you are seen as not belonging, when you bring too much baggage on the subway, you are not carried along by the common flow. More likely, you are at risk of being trampled, sneered at, mocked, maybe pushed, even pushed out, unless you are constantly alert, thinking about how the game works, making efforts to fit in, to keep up or slow down. If you are also trying to change the rules for everyone, to make space for more baggage, different professors, or walking while black,<sup>114</sup> this means a double burden, a double effort. For privileged actors, the situation is different.

In “flipping” Ahmed, we can see that it is a privilege not to have to think, not to have to notice, not to have to make efforts to to “feel part of [the] community.” Privilege is, in Ahmed’s terms “an energy-saving device” (2017, 125). But purposeful, or in Ahmed’s terminology, “willful” change requires questioning the game, its hierarchies. Therefore, while marginalized groups need the benefit of the doubt, privileged actors must choose to *doubt their benefits*. Internationals do not usually have to think or make efforts to stay invisible. As we have seen, whether their practices are stressful and taboo-ridden, or proud and responsible, when these feelings are shared around the same practices – when they go with the flow – internationals are invisible as political actors. Their behavior and being are not the main targets for change efforts.

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<sup>113</sup> Ahmed credits her ability to make sense of experiences of marginalization to her background in Cultural Studies, which “as a discipline begins with the lived experiences of not residing” (2017, 132). Perhaps this explains why using her work changes the perspective on international relations from the common sense in IR, which is developed from “the center” of world power. In Gruffydd Jones’ words the discipline of IR “traces its modern origins without embarrassment to a place and moment at the heart and height of imperialism (2006, 2).

<sup>114</sup> Ahmed refers to the blogpost “Walking while Black” by George Yancy, also commenting on the Trayvon Martin-case (Ahmed 2017, 143-144).

They are off the table personally, organizationally, and geopolitically; whether they are at INGOs or donor institutions, or work as peace researchers.

To willfully fail at the game, by choosing to make changes that interrupt the flow is to “choose to lose” this privilege. Losing this privilege means becoming vulnerable. That marginalized groups are more vulnerable (as defined by being in the margin), does not mean privileged actors are invulnerable. Compared to the previous situation, a loss of a privilege is still a loss, a loss of the effortless support of your crowd. For example, Ahmed describes leaving heterosexuality as leaving “a support system” (2017, 219). Without support we are more vulnerable.<sup>115</sup> We can imagine what such a vulnerability could look like for internationals by revisiting the practices of the different layers of the invisibility cloak, described in the first section of this chapter.

#### My peacebuilding data

The vulnerability involved in failing the game – breaking the shared orientation – is discernable in all layers of the invisibility cloak. In the glossy-top personal layer, the examples dealt with the inappropriateness of almost even acknowledging – to partners – that internationals have families and feelings. It is as if failing to stay personally invisible would instantly make them vulnerable to suspicions against their professionalism; are they really competent to evaluate applications and reports or to detect and discuss corruption credibly? In other words, acknowledging a personal life is a killjoy attack on the shared belief that invisibility is necessary for peacebuilding, and disrupts a comfortable conviction that a person belongs among

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<sup>115</sup> It is perhaps necessary to again stress the difference between being marginalized without having a say in the matter and losing privileges because of a choice to challenge the game. Privileged actors who make that choice will (probably) lose some privileges, but (probably) still have a stronger support system (in terms of financial opportunities, health, access, benefit of the doubt, etc.) to draw on.

internationals. Questioning the game inevitably means questioning yourself (as the next subsection will develop).

Meanwhile, the thick layer of organizational examples raises questions about what would happen if weaknesses regarding policies and routines (such as for handling workload), activities (such as project planning processes), and long-term direction (such as that developed in strategies) were dealt with openly, as a part of the partnership. The examples suggest that internationals close up and smoothen the surface of their invisibility cloak, making problems and partner input roll off with a joke as the way things are. Keeping that second skin without cracks, mean that my practitioner-me did not have to consider that learning project planning from or with partners (or scrapping the demands if the method was useless) was even an option. Nor did I have to get back to my dinner companions who suggested partners should influence the INGO strategy, or even reflect on the privilege involved in forgetting about it. It is as if failing to stay organizationally invisible, starting to cut this layer open, implies too much effort, too many daily changes. Indeed, one might ask what peacebuilding would be if it was not possible to continuously postpone changes because of stress,<sup>116</sup> but one had to stop and listen to what staff need; if it was not possible to demand procedures that one finds too hard to implement oneself, but instead develop methods along the way; or if it was necessary to stop and listen (even submit) to partners' priorities for one's strategic direction? In other words, what would peacebuilding look like if one could not carry on (feeling/business) as usual? Even as I write this (January 2018), my fingers hesitate on the keyboard because I do not have even beginnings of answers. Questioning the game does thus not only involve questioning oneself, but also the future direction (as the third subsection will develop).

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<sup>116</sup> Remember Goetze's (2017) discussion that work-related stress is one of the defining "sensibilities" of the peacebuilding field, discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, in the underlying geopolitical layer, the examples asserted benefits internationals get by sharing orientation with countries that are relatively privileged on the world status scale,<sup>117</sup> and working based on the feeling of superiority over “the other.” Advocacy activities are generally targeted toward “the other” government, and sticky colonialism means that internationals have the privilege of defining the problem (usually “over there”) and the solutions (usually “over here”). The vulnerability of flipping the hierarchy was discernable in the two counter-examples when the Western actors momentarily did “choose to lose” the benefit of a higher position. First, when they considered a program integrating activities “here” and “there” and suddenly realize this means competing for the assessment as competent without the advantage of starting from higher up, being competent by definition as internationals. Or, second, when partners were invited as experts on the situation “over here,” suddenly revealing long expertise and experience that perhaps may make efforts or concerns “at home” look simple or obvious compared to “away.” Such exceptions reveal the unspoken rules of the game, and shake the privileges that must be doubted, privileges which internationals must choose to lose in order to change the game.

*B) Failing the present self (selves): the discomfort and pain of doing things differently*

Ahmed

If sharing emotional orientation in and to practices makes you a part of a community, that is, if who you are is confirmed by what you do with whom and how you feel about it, then when you start doing differently, who are you? If the invisibility cloak works as a second skin, creating

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<sup>117</sup> Here, I include “local/national” employees as well, at least partly, to some extent. Even though their status is much more ambiguous, in some situations they also “benefit” from acting on behalf of an INGO from Sweden or the UK (or a donor from the US) compared with working for a “local” actor. Several of my interviewees in this position expressed this as an obvious part of the job, even a reason for seeking that job, even though they also brought up ways in which their everyday practices were different from those of their more unambiguously “international” colleagues (sometimes more complicated, sometimes easier according to their accounts).

the shape/contour of the international Subject, then pulling at its seams or trying to wear something else may feel very awkward. Remember Autessere's "interminable moments" as she came to her first Peaceland meeting late and in starkly inappropriate clothing, how she "scurried" to the back of the room to "hide." Losing the invisibility cloak may make your skin crawl, or even hurt as a new outfit chafes in unfamiliar places while you try to break in (get used to) your new way of doing things. This is even more likely when you are not only trying to change what you do, but what everybody does – that is, working willfully to change the game. By definition, a different game means different relations, and since selves are created in relation, questioning of selves is required for change. Here, I will show that to enable change, internationals must therefore prepare themselves for the discomfort and even pain of self-questioning that doing things differently demands.<sup>118</sup>

Flipping Ahmed – from being the one in question to questioning one's being

Ahmed points out that for people from marginalized groups, doing things differently is only one part of the work they have to do to change the game. The other part of their work for a different game is *being* the change. Not only does it take a lot of effort (as described above), but Ahmed describes it as often uncomfortable and even painful. It is uncomfortable not to fit in to structures made for other kinds of Subjects, like wearing a dress a different style than you are used to, or even like "banging your head against a brick wall" (to borrow a phrase from one of her interviewees (2017, 135)). Ahmed shows us that when you are doing – including doing *being* – in a way that is different than the mainstream, you can expect to be bruised by brick walls

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<sup>118</sup> Drawing on Arendt and Bourdieu, Topper (2011) analyses how repeated interactions between flamboyant and radical aids activists and formal and conservative (in expression style) scientists led to these two different emotional orientations turning towards each other, both adjusting. His account shows that while subjectivities can change from such reorientation, the process is often uncomfortable as well as open-ended.



constantly. Still, those walls may not even exist for subjects traveling the mainstream route. Returning to Ahmed's example of the subway crowd, you may commute every day and not even notice its direction or speed until you have to get through with a lot of baggage to a different destination. Writing this in Los Angeles county, it is easy to think of cars rushing (or at least crawling) by on a freeway.

With fellow drivers, you share the frustration of standstills on the I-405, the exhilaration of getting moving, and the sadness (or relief) of seeing accidents along the way. For many people, this is part of what makes you an Angeleno. But if you are trying to get around on a bike, the freeway is more likely to feel like a big barrier than a flow. If you wait for people in cars to make room, you could wait forever. If you get closer, get pushy, to force people to take notice, they may shout at you, call the police, or even try to hit you, to teach you a lesson. And if you just go about your way and throw yourself across, you are likely to get injured, bruised, perhaps killed. This may seem incomprehensible from a car – why would someone do that, ride a bike, why not just drive, like everybody else? Just by being different, one's being is in question, as if getting hurt is the cyclist's own fault.

In “flipping” Ahmed, we can see that it is a privilege to carry on business as usual. That is why privilege is energy-saving. It also means privilege keeps you comfortable and in one piece, with less bruises and less banging of your head against brick walls – because the barriers simply do not come up when you follow the flow (2017, 141). However, willful change requires exactly to *change* what one is doing, in order to change direction of the flow. Therefore, if marginalized people experience discomfort and pain from *being in question*, actors with privileges must choose to *question their being*. When they do the same old thing, they *are* the wall that less privileged actors are thrown against. Their feet will keep the old paths open, their

bodies will still be driving along the freeway, stopping cyclists or other change actors from making new paths. However, losing privileges by doing things differently (becoming visible) is likely to cause intense discomfort and self-questioning. Feminists Lugones and Spelman warned thirty-five years ago that white feminists who wanted to ally with feminists of color had to undertake “questioning of yourself and your roles in your own culture,” which was sure to be “extremely hard” (1983, 581, both quotes). An example of what this self-questioning and doing differently can mean for internationals is given by my interviewee Hopi, who described experimenting with a radically different set-up of the partnership.

My peacebuilding data

“[I]t’s not clear from the outset who should decide, who is the final arbiter. That was *uncomfortable* at times, especially for some team members [they said] ‘how long can they delay, we need to get to point X, just decide this now, just *move!*’”

*INGO interviewee*

This quote is from my INGO interviewee Hopi, and her story of when her team tried something new. In fact, they tried what some interviewees in Chapter 2 were wishing for: a completely equal formal contract between them as an international NGO and the local partner (in this case, a large and quite powerful organization). Usually, the INGO signs the contract with the donor and distributes money to local partners for their salaries based on the partner’s applications to the INGO. This time, the donor funding was only reimbursing concrete expenses and each organization (the INGO and the partner) was putting in their staff’s time as a signal of their commitment to the common project. At the set-up, this was somehow a relief to Hopi and her INGO. When the usual procedures are followed, they have to audit the financial routines of their partner organization, which would have been quite awkward as this partner was so much larger. As the partner had asked Hopi, “who are you to assess us?”

In our conversation, Hopi describes at length how differently the cooperation worked in comparison to other partnerships. For two years – a substantial time as far as peacebuilding projects go – they learned new ways of doing and being together that drew on the formal equality. For example, they developed the project through a process of identifying a shared agenda, even if finding common ground necessitated for the INGO to go, as she says “a little bit outside our comfort zone.” The fact that it was “really a shared issue” that motivated the project “truly set us out on an equal footing” and led to spectacular results that Hopi “could never have dreamt of.” These experiences meant Hopi hoped the partnership would be settled enough to deal with bumps along the way, However, she was almost proven wrong when trouble struck.

The bump in the road at first looked small, an additional activity which the partner was dealing with for which everybody agreed staff had to be paid through the common funding that Hopi’s INGO was responsible for. Hopi describes that “as *soon* as that happened, a number of issues broke out.” One such issue was that the auditing requirements kicked in and Hopi’s INGO had to scrutinize the partner organization. This was not popular, and when it was done it was time for the report. That’s when “things turned sour,” according to Hopi. The report dragged out as partner representatives were slow in coming up with information and the process stalled. For too long. The finance staff at Hopi’s INGO, were at first annoyed but when the delay put the INGO’s own donor relations in danger, that’s when they got “*uncomfortable*.” That’s when they demanded she “just decide this now, just *move!*” She admits it was an option she considered, but instead she decided to hold out longer. The resolution included negotiation between the organizations, as well as between finance and program staff within Hopi’s INGO. The example illustrates that doing differently means taking risks, making yourself vulnerable to questioning,

individually (whose competence mattered here) and organizationally (what kind of partner were they), and embarking on an open-ended process.

Doing differently makes INGOs question their very being. At first, just partnering with a larger organization, makes the INGO ask, “who are *we* to tell *them*...” Business as usual means, as we have seen, that INGOs are competent to ask partners anything about their organizational routines. Second, agreeing to a formally equal contract might be compared to the INGO dropping their invisibility cloak and stepping out (or sitting down next to), getting visible as partners themselves. Third, doing one thing differently led to new and previously unknown options when trouble struck. Instead of “just decid[ing] this now,” they waited, accepted negotiating, taking time, and risking their donor relations.

However, while this experiment also yielded spectacular results, this was not obvious at the time. Quite the opposite. Hopi’s qualified staff were “*uncomfortable*” and their own agreement with a long-standing donor was threatened, which may have jeopardized not only this but future projects. Hopi’s example thus provides some input to the possibilities what failing to (achieve) change can mean, when internationals are prepared to give up their privilege of doing business as usual and instead choose to question themselves and their practices.

*C) Failing the present future: the uncertainty of a politics of change*

Ahmed

Sharing emotional orientation means following the same paths or lines laid out for subjects like you, towards the same or similar goals that promise shared happiness. The sharing means there is a “we” who share the commitment to these lines, who get happy when our peers hit the promised milestones along the way, as expected. Above, I have used Ahmed’s work to clarify why working for willful change – also in peacebuilding – requires you to be a killjoy. We have seen that doing differently (failing the game) breaks that shared orientation, and puts the we

– and thus the I (or multiple I:s) – into question. In this subsection, I will draw the consequences beyond the present game and the (multiple) selves to analyze how stepping out of line to change the game inevitably disrupts the path to the future. Again, even if willing change in principle means you are welcoming a different future, this does not mean internationals are prepared in practice to deal with the emotional consequences. Here, I will argue that internationals must prepare to lose the certainty of following the lines already laid out and prepare to live with the uncertainty of an open future, where detailed scripts are replaced by politics.

Flipping Ahmed – from certain reproduction of inequality to uncertain politics of change

Being marginalized means living a life full of uncertainty. You are not certain if you can follow the flow; can you pass as someone who belongs today? Or, if you are certain that you *cannot* pass, that you will stick out like an eye sore from the mainstream flow – then you are uncertain of what responses you may encounter. You could be welcomed, an invitation, which Ahmed points out, is often qualified with demands for gratefulness or for assimilation (as Autessere described Peaceland). Responses could also be mocking, or hostile – or in the rare case curious (which Ahmed says to treat like a gift). If no one does anything differently, this situation persists and domination continues; that is, there is a *certain reproduction of inequality*,<sup>119</sup> keeping the same people in the margin. In other words, marginalized people can at least be sure that they must make more efforts to fit in than mainstream actors as the game is stacked against them (or they would not be marginalized). Uncertainty is thus one of the defining conditions for marginalized groups. For relatively privileged actors though, uncertainty is likely to be an unusual experience.

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<sup>119</sup> In contrast to the previous subheadings, “benefit of the doubt” and “being in question,” Ahmed does not use this phrase “certain reproduction of inequality.” Instead, this is my articulation of her take on uncertainty and certainty from her discussion on privileges vs. marginalization, where she establishes that reproducing this inequality is also political, a politics of domination (see 2017, 170).

In “flipping” Ahmed, we see that it is a privilege to be certain. Privileged actors can be (relatively) certain that if they follow the lines laid out, they will be carried along with the crowd, and can generally trust that those lines or paths will take them towards the promised, “happy,” future. There may be variations, or glitches along the way, but generally, they can be pretty sure of what will happen next. Indeed, throughout this chapter, we have seen how internationals of different kinds are characterized by having answers, solutions, suggestions, and pedagogical (rather than curious) questions, whereas local actors are characterized as having problems and needs. However, to change the game means to change the end point, the goal, the direction. And since we are not talking about changing the tires of a car (where we know what the end result looks like and can download a manual for how to do it), but about equalizing international power relations (a scenario which no one alive has seen and many have trouble imagining the practical steps toward) there cannot be certainty. That, at least is for certain. Therefore, to willfully contribute to change, internationals thus must actively choose to lose their privilege of certainty and prepare to handle feelings of uncertainty.

Another way of saying this is that internationals must learn to handle politics. Many political philosophers define politics exactly by its openness, its uncertain outcome. Here, Hannah Arendt’s (1998) distinction between “work” and “action” is helpful. Where “work” constitutes the instrumental shaping of worldly things (such as chairs and tables), “action” denotes open-ended political initiatives that define the human as a unique being who alone can willfully “begin” something new.<sup>120</sup> While actions cannot be undone, Arendt encourages us that there is always the possibility to “forgive” and “begin again.” Ahmed similarly encourages us to

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<sup>120</sup> Similar distinctions between on the one hand open-ended and contestable value-based answers, and on the other technical questions with closed-ended, unambiguous answers have been made, for example, between politics vs. police (Rancière), ethico-political vs. juridico-technical issues (Foucault), decisions vs. protocol (Derrida), etc.

brave action by using the concept of a “snap!” A snap! is the moment when an actor has had enough, and loudly breaks past ties, stepping out of line. Ahmed points out that while a snap! is not *the start* in the terms of an ordinary action (it is rather a reaction to built-up pressure, pressure with a history), a snap! can be *a start* of something. That is, by stepping out of line, breaking a tie, one opens up to chance to new possibilities (2017, 198).

However, just as Arendtian action is open-ended, it is never possible to know for sure what will happen after a snap! Instead, Ahmed says, a snap! opens for “an optimism without a [known] future, an optimism that makes a break of something the start of something without knowing what this something is, or what it might be” (2017, 200). Questioning your investment in the present game is thus also highly political. The final privilege that I think privileged actors must choose to lose is therefore the certainty of following lines already laid out. In other words, internationals must accept *the uncertainty of a politics of change*.

#### My peacebuilding data

Going back over the interviews, by now it should be no surprise that uncertainty particularly characterizes the counter-examples, the exceptions to business as usual. The uncertainty of an unknown future is intertwined with the vulnerability of stepping out of line and doubting your benefits, and with the discomfort or pain of suddenly (or gradually) doubting your self (or selves). While the future is undetermined by definition, some choices make that uncertainty more acute, more obvious than others. Here, I will just pick up a few examples to remind of such moments.

The most recent example, in the previous subsection, was of course Hopi’s organization when it tried something new: a formally equal contract, with a larger organization. Making the change formal meant that the INGO had to be committed throughout the project. While this was

going well for two years, the need to temporarily go back to the old model, suddenly exposed many of its hierarchical assumptions. This included the INGO's (otherwise) taken-for-granted right to assess the financial procedures, even if both actors found this unreasonable. Thus, Hopi's INGO was suspended between the two models, formally in an equal and an unequal project at the same time. They were trying to change the game while playing it, the situation of any practitioner willing change. They had chosen to lose the privilege of a (taken-for-granted) unequal contract, and now they risked losing either their partner (by enforcing old game rules), or their funding (by not enforcing those rules), in which case they would not have been able to work with the partner anyway. The example shows that stepping out of line means a reorientation; suddenly the questions are not only about the actors who are perceived to be failing the present game, but about the game itself. The uncertainty that follows such an opening was felt by Hopi and staff members individually, and organizationally, as a questioning of who they were as a partner. The future of the partnership became open-ended, and by accepting the political quality of their position (rather than insisting that procedures were merely technical), the uncertainty of politics was clearly felt.

Another example is one of the exceptions from the first subsection above. In this example, an evaluation of a grassroots program led to Marcos' reflections about interconnectedness between problems "at home" and "away." He described how linking domestic issues with their peacebuilding work abroad suddenly radically opened up questions about the future. What would they do, with whom, where, and who would pay for it? What kind of relationship would they have to their government, or their public? What would happen to partners? Would it even be "peacebuilding" at all?<sup>121</sup> Choosing (if even for a moment) to lose the

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<sup>121</sup> Thanks to Stacey Liou for this point.



privilege of certainty, the future was no longer only about following lines laid out, following procedure or business as usual. Instead, there was an opening, a reorientation, where focus shifted from questions about what to do with, for, or about the partner organizations to questions about the game itself. Changing the game thus requires internationals to choose to lose their privilege of certainty and accept the uncertainty inherent in politics, in order to even discuss what practices could look like in such an open future.

*D) Section conclusion*

The second step of the analysis of internationals' invisibility cloak has shown that the emotional is political. By treating change as willful failure, by emphasizing that privileged actors must choose to lose their privileges, and by taking into account the emotional consequences, the analysis has shown that change in peacebuilding partnerships may be possible. However, to contribute to change and learn to listen more receptively, internationals must drop, unravel, or undo their invisibility cloak, and give up its comforting protection of their privileges. That is, they must prepare to handle emotions of failure explicitly.

The emotions I have identified here as likely to follow the loss of privileges are the vulnerability of failing the present game, the discomfort or pain of failing the present version of themselves, and the uncertainty of failing the present version of the imagined future. If internationals instead carry on as usual, they will keep pushing the burden of change work squarely onto the shoulders of marginalized actors; their bodies will be concrete barriers that move in ways which stop attempts for change; and their questions will keep the attention on marginalized actors as "failing" the present version on the game rather than put the game itself into question. Preparing for the emotional consequences of questioning the game, the self (selves), and the future instead means opening up for a *politics* of change. Such politics can find

expressions through experimentation with different practices – including emotional practices – than the ones taken for granted today.

## 5. Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have further investigated the finding that internationals' everyday emotional practices orient attention exclusively towards their local partners, making themselves invisible as political actors in the partnerships and thus less able to listen receptively. Using the image of an invisibility cloak, patched up by what internationals do and say on a daily basis, I have examined the thickness and reach of the cloak in order to assess the possibilities for change. Revisiting my interviews with INGOs, I found that the invisibility cloak works to make internationals invisible in three layers, making unraveling it even more difficult. Adding further interviews with donors and peace researchers, I suggested that the invisibility cloak covers the international Subject of peacebuilding in general, making the question of a change of outfit even more urgent. To address the chapter heading directly "Can [this international and invisible] Subject (learn to) Listen?" I again used a two-step analysis. The first step of Bourdieusian practice-based analysis found the answer to be "no, probably not..." The reason is that such approaches stop short of developing insights of how criteria for *competence* are reproduced into analysis of possibilities for change. Particularly, they leave aside that working for change means *failing* the present game, that failure/change means some actors must lose their privileges, and that such losses will have emotional consequences. Therefore, the second step turned again to feminist approaches that work with change as willful failure.

Turning again to Sara Ahmed (2017), the second step thus explored what change can mean in practice. To do so, I flipped Ahmed's insights on consequences of failure for marginalized actors to examine what failure can mean for actors who have privileges they must

“choose to lose.” Particularly, I argue that internationals must prepare to lose three types of privileges and deal with the emotional consequences. Concretely, this means that the answer to “Can the Subject (Learn to) Listen?” changes to a cautious “yes, if...” That is, yes if internationals prepare to deal with the vulnerability involved in questioning the game and making yourself visible, the discomfort or pain in questioning your self (selves), and the uncertainty in accepting an open-ended, political future.

The shortest way to summarize the conclusion is thus that “the emotional is political.” What this means in practical possibilities will be further developed in Chapter 5, along with the methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions of the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE EMOTIONAL IS POLITICAL**

### **Conclusions and contributions**

Why are internationals in peacebuilding so bad at listening to their local partners? In theory, everybody in peacebuilding seems to agree that colonial hierarchies are obsolete (as discussed in Chapter 1) and that it is in fact counter-productive for internationals to act as if they know more and must control their local partners.<sup>122</sup> Yet, in practice internationals still do not seem to manage to shift their mode from speaking (or listening instrumentally) to listening receptively, that is, in a manner open to change. Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in peacebuilding are puzzled by this gap between internationals' increasing emphasis on listening to local actors and findings that such local partners do not feel heard. "Why does change seem so difficult?" Anderson et al. (2012, 145) ask as they wrap up their multi-year listening to thousands of practitioners. While many point to alternative explanations such as internationals pretending to listen or simply believing they know better than locals, these do not explain the international actors who really want to listen and know they should but seem unable to do so in practice.

My dissertation fills this gap by posing the question in a new way. Combining practice-based peacebuilding partnership literature with cognitive research I ask two questions: 1) How do the emotional (aspects of) internationals' everyday practices create possibilities or obstacles for their receptive listening to local partners (addressed in Chapters 2 and 3), and 2) What can these emotional (aspects of) practices tell us about the possibilities of change toward more receptive listening (addressed in Chapter 4)?

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<sup>122</sup> In addition to the Nairobi document from 2016 on development funding which was referenced in Chapter 1 and establishes that "the donor-recipient relationships of the past have been replaced" by a model of equal partnership, see for example contributions by Autessere and others in Barnett (2016) "Paternalism beyond Borders" which discuss various aspects of such paternalistic politics of knowledge.

To understand possibilities for internationals to listen receptively to local actors in practice, I asked questions about their daily tasks. I carried out over sixty in-depth interviews with practitioners of INGOs, donor institutions, and peace research. In these interviews, I paid attention to the emotions they expressed in relation to other ordinary practices. I also drew on my experience as a practitioner to relate to interviewees as knowing subjects, interested in and capable of a reflexive conversation about these practices. I used my own reactions as data generated by the research to reflexively write myself into (rather than out of) my research account. Finally, I analyzed the data generated using practice-based approaches, and when I found these lacking in power to explain emotions and willful failure (toward change), I integrated insights from intersectional feminist work and activism (flipped to concern privileged actors). Together, these research practices enabled new insights into the two questions asked above about the listening puzzle.

Simply put, my dissertation shows that the emotional is political. With this I mean that internationals who want to listen better and therefore challenge the practical “rules” of peacebuilding partnerships risk being deemed as “failing” the present version of the game, which has emotional consequences. To be deemed competent players in peacebuilding today, internationals wear an emotional “invisibility cloak” which hides them from scrutiny and keeps (almost) all the attention on their local partners. Through my interviews, for example, we have heard an INGO practitioner exclaim “It’s not supposed to be about us!”; two different researchers scoff that they “don’t care if [INGOs] are tired” as this is just from “office politics”; and a donor express not feeling anything about his/her job as that would “seem[] a bit full of ourselves, no?” This shared orientation makes internationals invisible, places them outside the partnership, and thus makes it harder for them to hear anything which may shift relations

between them and locals toward more equality. However, “relations” imply that internationals are, in fact, not outside but part of the *partnership*. Therefore, in order to shift relations, I argue that internationals must “appear” as political actors, that is, as actors with stakes in the partnerships. Appearing requires that internationals “choose to lose” their privileges, specifically their invisibility cloak. However, doing so has emotional consequences; the emotional is political. Based on these findings, below I develop practical recommendations for change, as well as the methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions of the dissertation.

### **1. Practical strategies: willful failure to appear and “killjoy support” practices**

Paradoxically, my research emphasizes that to improve their listening to local partners, internationals in peacebuilding must pay more attention to *themselves* and their own practices, including emotions.<sup>123</sup> Otherwise, they simply push the burden of change onto the (local) actors already carrying the burden of the existing inequalities.<sup>124</sup> However, given the comfort of the

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<sup>123</sup> The attention to self aligns with much literature on receptivity in listening and learning which emphasizes the necessity to be self-aware and regulate self, one’s emotions and/or reactions. In political science, for example, Park-Kang’s (2011) discussion of how proponents of mainstream IR can listen better to feminist IR emphasizes “self-regulation” (alongside “partner-orientation,” and “risk taking”). Lugones’ and Spelman’s (1983) classic piece on how white feminists can listen better to feminists of color go in-depth on the “painful self-questioning” the former must undertake to “know themselves in their own society.” Bickford’s (1996) still much-referenced work on political listening rejects (drawing on Anzaldù) the idea that it is desirable to merge perspectives, opting instead for “clarifying conflict” as a way to enable action forward (even though Schiff’s (2015) review of Dobson claims Bickford advocates self-annihilation, this quote is taken out of context). Both Dobson (2014) and Bassel (2017) highlight the importance that the usual speakers (politicians, journalists etc) pay attention to if and how they meet those in more marginalized positions (even if Bassel pays more attention to how the latter can raise their voices to be heard, the more common focus). In literature on organizational learning, awareness and regulation of one’s own emotions is key to a receptive state of mind where lessons can be integrated and creatively applied (see, for example, Kolb 2013, Magnusson 2007).

<sup>124</sup> See for example, Ahmed’s (2012) discussion of the requirement that marginalized (what I call “failing”) actors stop and “give an account of themselves, whereas the “competent” actors are left the privilege of continuing as usual. This is also at the heart of Wilcox’ (2017) critique of the practice turn, and other (particularly queer) theorists, such as Butler’s (2005) focus on the impossibility of being a transparent and coherent subject. For an example of such continued demands by IR mainstream scholars that feminist scholars explain themselves *in the terminology of the mainstream* before they are worthy of consideration, see the “You Just Don’t Understand” debate (Keohane 1989; Tickner 1997; Waylen 2007; Weber 1994; Zalewski 2007). For examples of how colonialism works according to the same logic, only ever as contingent exceptions granting colonized population access to the same categories of, for example “innocence,” “women,” and “civilized” in order to be deemed proper “civilians” worthy of protection, see Kinsella (2011).

invisibility cloak, which (as I have shown) hides internationals from scrutiny, personally, organizationally, and geopolitically, internationals are likely to feel vulnerable, uncomfortable, and uncertain when they start exposing (and articulating) more of themselves and their own stakes in the partnership. Doing so breaks shared orientations of invisibility that are taken for granted in the international peacebuilding community. Chapter 4 showed that Sara Ahmed's figure of the "killjoy" helps us imagine change strategies by highlighting the courage needed to deal with the awkward discomfort that comes with breaking shared norms. My research draws on Ahmed's "killjoy" to suggest two kinds of practical strategies for change, which I here call "killjoying" and "killjoy support." In this section, I will first briefly highlight examples identified in the previous chapter of "killjoying" used by my interviewees and the emotional consequences they involve. Second, I will spend most of the section discussing how strategies for "killjoy support" could be developed to deal with such consequences.

First, "killjoying" practices are simply practices where international peacebuilding actors break commonly shared orientations (drop/unravel the invisibility cloak) in ways that make themselves visible as political actors, actors with stakes in the partnerships. Chapter 4 identified a few examples of killjoying, which revealed its emotional consequences. In the first killjoy-example, an INGO invited partners as experts with valuable knowledge relevant to a panel about nationalism, a sensitive political topic in the Western "home" country. Doing so involved rupturing the taken-for-granted hierarchy of knowledge where internationals are assumed to always have relevant input to local actors and contexts but the reverse is not the case. Instead, they made themselves vulnerable by admitting that they themselves did not have the answers and could learn, even from Southern actors. In the second killjoy-example, the evaluation of an INGO project led to questions which ruptured the taken-for-granted separation of issues "at

home” and those “away.” Instead, treating issues as globally connected led to questioning the future identity, funding, and even existence of the organization. In the third killjoy-example, an INGO entered into an agreement with a partner vis-à-vis donors as formal equals. Doing so meant rupturing the taken-for-granted hierarchies of decision-making where internationals are meant to assess, evaluate, and when push comes to shove, be the final arbiter of conflicting opinions between themselves and partners. Instead, they risked their own funding and had to develop their capacity to endure the (internal and external) uncertainty of open negotiations.

Even such simple examples show how flipping positions immediately makes internationals appear as actors with stakes in the partnerships and highlights the courage that political “appearance” requires (Arendt 1998). The killjoying examples show that if and when they choose to lose their privilege of invisibility internationals are forced to deal with the vulnerability of exposure, the discomfort (even pain) of self-questioning, and the uncertainty of politics. The importance of my findings is thus not simply *that* internationals feel things during their work days, or *what* they feel in relation to which practices, but *how* such shared orientations make a material difference in peacebuilding: by making internationals less likely and able to change towards the new game of (more) equal relations coveted in the field. While some of these practices, such as formal equality in donor agreements, are floated as suggestions in the peacebuilding literature, evaluating them through the lens of in/visibility of internationals can help us prioritize among such practices and assess their likelihood of leading to change.

Second, my dissertation reveals the importance “killjoy support” practices, a completely novel contribution of the dissertation (to my knowledge). With “killjoy support” practices, I mean that internationals who want peacebuilding to change toward more equal relations will be helped by developing practices to help them deal with the emotional consequences of becoming



(and remaining) killjoys. At the end of *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed shares her own “killjoy survival kit” to inspire other actors to think about what kinds of resources they can draw on to sustain their activism for change towards a more equal society. In her survival kit (2017, 234-249), Ahmed has ten types of “items:” books, things, tools, time, life, permission notes, other killjoys, humor, feelings, and bodies. Drawing on (and flipping) Ahmed’s survival kit, below I sketch what some such self-care and self-challenging “killjoy support” practices could look like for practitioners, whether they are (working for) INGOs, donors, or in research. In doing so, I also link to further useful resources, particularly on listening as part of a dispositional (embodied) ethics, emotional safety in organizations, and international responsiveness (rather than responsibility to protect). A common key characteristic of “killjoy support” practices is to go beyond verbal policies or statements to alternative physical, embodied, and institutional set-ups which help internationals to develop different embodied dispositions from today. I organize the suggestions as relevant for unravelling the personal, organizational, and geopolitical layers of the invisibility cloak respectively.

A) *Personal “killjoy support” practices*

It may be easiest to imagine embodied “killjoy support” practices aimed at the personal layer of the invisibility cloak as we are used to thinking of persons as bodies and of (embodied experiences such as) emotions as personal. For example, we easily understand how INGO practitioners become personally invisible in the partnership when they can ask about partners’ families as potential reasons for a late report, while never sharing their own personal details. And if they did “killjoy” by sharing such information, they might be immediately suspect as personally incompetent or corrupt evaluators of the funding applications of local actors. Similarly, if a person would “killjoy” by questioning the constant overtime required to fulfill demands for both grassroots and professional authenticity, s/he might personally face criticism as

being unfit for the job, not able to take it. A person who “killjoys” by questioning positive emotions, such as fulfilling a responsibility to link local partners closer to donors, may face even more personal resistance for disrupting shared orientations among international peers. As it is easy to imagine the need for “killjoy support” for those who target the personal layer of the invisibility cloak, I start with possible practices that help unravel this layer.

Personal practices for re-orienting attention towards the self can draw on Emily Beausoleil’s recent work on embodied strategies for receptivity. Beausoleil has interviewed “physical practitioners” (2017, 292), such as choreographers, dancers, and massage therapists. Exploring the kinds of strategies they use, she has organized these as useful to “preparing” for listening, “remaining receptive” in the face of challenges, and “cultivating the conditions for listening” in order to institutionalize encouragement to receptivity.<sup>125</sup>

For example, embodied strategies that Beausoleil’s practitioners use to prepare for receptivity in concrete encounters include seemingly simple efforts like pausing, however briefly, to take in the surroundings and “widen[] our sense of the field to which we must attend” (Beausoleil 2017, 303). Her interviewees also described that they “identify and “clear” their own mental and emotional state” (2017, 304) for receptivity. In brief, this involves such practices as “attention to the breath,” “consciously relaxing the body,” “mental and physical strategies,” as well as discursive practices, such as shifting from judgmental to observational language. All in all, “such practices seek to develop the capacity to listen to subtler and more varied cues from one’s environment” (2017, 304). They can thus be helpful to individual preparation for emotional challenges of receptivity in encounters with local partners as well as in attempts to

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<sup>125</sup> Beausoleil (2017) develops these categories as part of a project to connect embodied strategies for receptivity to a dispositional ethics (as developed in writings of Tully, Schiff, and Butler). The three categories correspond to challenges to the self identified by writers on such ethics: the self as “in context” (relational rather than atomistic), as “multitude” (fragmented, rather than unitary), and “in-context” (evolving, rather than stable).

do differently within the organization. Once such interactions are set in motion, Beausoleil suggests different strategies for “remaining receptive.”

If “remaining receptive” is about remaining open to new understandings and to the possibility of becoming different, such strategies are also about resisting closure, resisting the impulse to defend one’s present self. Instead of defending a coherent self, Beausoleil’s (2017) interviewees use a host of strategies based on using fragmentation as a strength, even when it implies contradictions. Such strategies can be mental, by visualizing separate parts of the self as articulating different standpoints, or verbal, by expressing these alternatives to others. Physical strategies include moving around in the room between articulating an experience and commenting on it, trying to respond to input while doing “complex repeated physical tasks” which interrupts your habitual affective response, or locating alternative responses to different parts of your body rather than assume that one response covers all of you (2017, 307). All these strategies serve to “soften[] the grip of identification with any one affective response and enabl[e] various possible routes of action” (2017, 306). Peacebuilding practitioners can thus be helped to remain receptive personally, through mental, verbal, and physical strategies of imagining, articulating, and making physical (variations of) alternative possibilities. Together these strategies make up concrete tools to live with open-endedness and contradictions.

Combining Beausoleil’s embodied strategies with the resources that Ahmed put in her killjoy survival kit shows us some common components of “killjoy support” practices. For example, Ahmed also emphasizes the importance of slowing down to listen to your body (2017, 247), acknowledging and paying attention to one’s feelings (2017, 246), and of taking time to get some distance from your own immediate reactions (2017, 242). Many of her “items” are justified by the need to let go of self-judgement and be more self-accepting, for example, that you may

need to take a break (2017, 242), have a laugh (2017, 245), and to include some “permission slips” (2017, 244) when failing to fit in takes too much of a toll on your person. Actors who want to experiment with “killjoy support” practices for the personal layer can thus take some guidance in these common components. As Autessere (2014) describes, persons who “challenge the norm” (274) suffer “strong resistance from their peers” (273). To cope with such resistance and stay in the game – working in and on the system – persons who want to killjoy as internationals in peacebuilding, may be helped by these (and other) embodied strategies as offered by Beausoleil.

However, my research highlights that visibility is multi-layered, that is, mundane practices not only make internationals visible personally, but also organizationally and geopolitically. Despite their focus on selves as social, the strategies of Ahmed and Beausoleil lean towards the individual. In the following subsections, I therefore complement their suggestions with other sources, to suggest practices for emotional self-care and self-challenges around organizational and geopolitical visibility of internationals in peacebuilding.

#### *B) Organizational “killjoy support” practices*

While it is relatively easy to imagine what embodied “killjoy support” practices can mean for individuals, it is less intuitive for organizations. My findings suggest that there is reason to call the organizational layer of the invisibility cloak the thickest; just about everything about the local partner organization is explicitly questioned, scrutinized, and thought to be improvable within the partnerships, whereas the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the INGO are kept off the table. Re-orientation, or “killjoying” to expose and change more of the organizational aspects of the international peacebuilding self can also make these actors more vulnerable. For example, if partners are invited as experts to a public panel on problems “over here” the INGO risks losing credibility for not knowing more than them, or for exaggerating problems to be as bad as “over there.” Or, if researchers want to bring findings back to

researched populations to discuss implications or perhaps even theorize together, funding is likely to be insufficient or unavailable. Killjoying organizationally thus also involves risks of “failing” the present game and its emotional consequences, and my dissertation highlights the need to develop institutional “killjoy support” practices addressing such risks.

To start, both Beausoleil and Ahmed provide some guidance for resources to develop organizational or institutional “killjoy support” practices. First, Beausoleil recognizes that restricting strategies to individual bodies “risks reducing politics to physiology if we fail to consider how power and history shape /.../ the political sites where receptivity and responsiveness are most needed” (2017, 313). She tentatively suggests strategies for “cultivating the conditions for listening,” that is, formal and informal institutions that can support actors in choosing more receptive practices. Such strategies would mean international killjoys attend to how organizational procedures and roles are set up as these can provide support for killjoying consequences. For example, the pace and amount of time an organization allows for different steps in the partnership, the spaces required and used to do so, and a leadership which models the desired emotional practices and enable colleagues to experiment, fail, reflect, and learn together can increase the likelihood of organizational killjoy initiatives. It also means the organization should attend to whether and how its method and culture encourage the long-term development of more receptive dispositions (2017, 309-11) as quick cognitive insights may not translate into the kind of bodily knowledge that guides many of our actual actions (2017, 311).

Second, while Ahmed’s presents her survival kit to inspire individual killjoys, I suggest that many of the “items” in the kit help us imagine useful questions to experiment with relevant peacebuilding practices. For example, Ahmed includes “other killjoys,” both as allies and as a kind of accompanying challengers who keep killjoys from becoming “too confident” (2017, 7).

Pushing the survival kit to work for organizations means asking where organizations can find such allies and “critical friends” (to use Holvikivi’s (2016) concept). Should they look internally for particular functions, personalities, or locations? Or externally, among “most similar” or “most different” organizations to stimulate ongoing “failure” of the present invisibility rules? How can both self-care and self-challenge be built into other organizational routines? That is, again, how can an organization institutionalize the discomfort and exposure of failing *in the game* as they continuously keep working *on* questioning the rules of the same game?

Third, as my research brings out the importance of the organizational layer, it enables practitioners to search for other resources dealing with emotional aspects of change in organizations *as an explicit part of their willful failure/work for change*. For example, INGOs (as well as donor and research institutions) can draw on organizational research on relational leadership (Gottfredson and Aguinis 2016), emotional safety and regulation in the workplace (Tamir and Gutentag 2017), and experiential learning (Kolb 2013, Magnusson 2007). For large institutions (such as national donors), the recent iteration of “trust-based management”<sup>126</sup> can be a relevant resource. It is a direct reaction against the New Public Management (NPM) model that has been driving much of the “audit culture” (see references in Chapter 1) and result-based management (RBM) problematized by my interviewees. For example, the Swedish government has recently commissioned an investigation into whether “trust-based management” can replace NPM in health care, which may spread to other policies, such as those on development funding and peacebuilding.<sup>127</sup> In sum, while organizational “killjoy support” practices may require a bit

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<sup>126</sup> In the popular management literature, the term trust-based management is used very broadly, which is why I specify my use of the institutional variety here.

<sup>127</sup> That shifting away from NPM/RBM is no done deal is demonstrated by the Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency’s recent (spring 2018) advertisement of a seminar titled to the effect of “Why more RBM is necessary to deal with the problems of RBM.”

more work and imagination than those supporting personal “killjoying,” there are relevant resources to draw on, in the work of Beausoleil and Ahmed as well as beyond.

*C) Geopolitical practices*

Finally, my research points to the importance of developing “killjoy support” practices that emotionally support killjoys who work to make internationals visible geopolitically. This way, my dissertation enables linking mundane practices *in* the system to long-term large-scale work *on* the hierarchical system that regularly places actors related to the North higher than actors of the South. My examination shows that while the personal layer of the invisibility cloak may be the easiest to grasp and the organizational one the thickest, the geopolitical layer provides the underlying warp and weft that structure peacebuilding relations. In other words, almost any aspect and official actor of the political context “over there” can be investigated, analyzed, and targeted by INGOs, while the engagement with governments and other actors “over here” is more limited and leaves them out of scrutiny. By using Ahmed’s work which emphasizes that emotions work to *create and shape* actors, my research thus demonstrates how banal peacebuilding practices contribute to *the continued re-creation* of a privileged (and invisible) North and a subordinate South at the geopolitical scale (despite formal decolonization).

My dissertation thus challenges research and commonsense objections which state that actors working for change must choose between targeting *either* emotions (implicitly categorized as individual traits or possessions) *or* structure.<sup>128</sup> Instead, I have shown how emotions work to

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<sup>128</sup> This is also why I avoid using the language of levels, or labeling emotions as micro and structures as macro (see for example, Solomon and Steele 2017). I think doing so reproduces a false distinction and reproduces a gendered idea of emotions as individual (micro), a marginalizing move which places emotions in opposition to structural (macro) issues implicitly deemed more important.

weave individuals and structures together,<sup>129</sup> and that therefore, attention to emotions is a necessary component to work aiming to unravel unequal political structures.

The fact that my investigation clarifies how emotions link internationals' everyday practices with geopolitical structures makes further resources for change more readily available. Particularly, I suggest that works in sociology (on culture and social movements, and on narratives) and in political theory (on international responsiveness) are relevant resources for internationals who want to killjoy geopolitically. These bodies of literature highlight how new collective subjectivities (such as social movements, or constituencies for peace) are, or can be formed by concrete emotional practices. They can thus inspire peacebuilding killjoys who may feel that my study makes impossible links between individual actions and global effects. While encouraging "killjoy support" practices which use emotions to shape collective subjects differently than today may seem manipulative or authoritarian, researcher Neta Crawford reminds us that business as usual also draw on emotions. In fact, Crawford states that the already existing "structures and practices of world politics /.../ express and alter our emotional relationships with others, [though] once institutionalized, the passion seems to recede from view, as overtly emotional language is replaced with the language of justification, beliefs, and reasons" (2014, 546). In other words, talking about emotions may only seem inappropriate when these are "outlaw emotions" (Jaggar 1989, discussed in Chapter 1) in relation to the existing rules – which are no less emotional, just less outlaw.

Briefly then, peacebuilding killjoys can find support in sociological findings of how social movements are formed. When old cultural "schemas" of "how we do things" start chafing

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<sup>129</sup> This aligns with Jasper's review of emotions in social movements research, where he exclaims that "Even so-called structures—such as voting systems, well-armed police, or cleavages among elite opponents—operate at least partly through the emotions they arouse" (2011, 22).



against more and more people doing things differently, this can mean that “familiar, routinized practices [are] becoming problematic in a way that *creates new actors* and interests” (Polletta 2008, 85, emphasis added).<sup>130</sup> While such situations can help existing actors to challenge their view of themselves (self-challenge), it also highlights that they may find allies (other killjoys) who take shape along the way (for self-care). Therefore, institutionalizing procedures to look around more creatively for emerging actors can be a useful practice to find and fertilize seeds of new social movements before they “exist” in a more material and recognizable sense.<sup>131</sup>

Sociological work on narratives and social movements further underlines the importance of targeting overall stories (what practice theorists call “background knowledge” (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 6-7)) as well as concrete practices. Broad cultural narratives shape people’s understanding of concrete actions and can limit their possibilities of hearing a new, unfamiliar message (Polletta et al. 2009). My dissertation underlines this point and shows how “killjoy support” practices could include talking about practical personal and organizational changes (“killjoying”) *in relation to* geopolitical structures. For example, if an organization attempts to killjoy by refusing workplace stress and prioritizing reflective learning among staff they might be criticized for being lazy or indulgent. However, if they take care to articulate how their actions constitute a challenge to colonial patterns of superior and paternalistic internationals,

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<sup>130</sup> Sociologists Michael Strand and Omar Lizardo have recently (2017) theorized such mismatches through Bourdieu’s concept of “hysteresis” (when the habitus clashes with an environment that is different from that in which the habitus was formed). They theorize that such mismatches are regular occurrences, and that actors (as individuals and/or groups) deal with them through four different modes of reflexivity (as opposed to “pre-reflexive” dispositions): anomic, traditional, ironic, and radical. Their contribution seems a relevant resource to go deeper into the societal, geopolitical level.

<sup>131</sup> Just as the sociology of culture this way enables social movements scholars to study the time “before” particular movements are discernable, there is a small strand of work in peacebuilding practice literature that attempts to identify conditions and practices “before” events such as the Arab spring uprisings to improve our understanding of why such movements take shape at some moments in time (and place) and not others. See for example, Mannergren Selimovic (2017). In addition, Ahmed’s (2004c) and others (e.g. Nussbaum 2013) work on how emotions create national collectives can be useful.

they might (eventually) be met with more acceptance in the field. Of course, the more they develop such a narrative (and the more acceptance it gains), the more likely they are to be held accountable to that standard, encountering continuous challenges along the – open-ended – path. Such a development would mean things are changing and the geopolitical layer of the invisibility cloak is unraveling. But, as long as internationals themselves are invisible, or “off the table” and seen as innocent outsiders, it simply does not make sense to target their emotional practices (even though Autessere’s account is littered with them). Therefore, shifting the overall cultural narrative to clarify the connection between everyday practices and the persistence of colonial patterns (in knowledge politics, resource flows, decision-making, *and* emotional visibility) constitutes an example of geopolitical “killjoy support” practices.

A final and related resource I want to point to for geopolitical “killjoy support” practices is the work in political theory on international responsiveness which Beausoleil (2017) draws on to develop her dispositional ethics (discussed in the personal subsection above). Simply put, international responsiveness is a narrative of international relations which involves exactly such a shift in the view of internationals as described above (Williams 2017). Whereas mainstream discourses on peacebuilding and the responsibility to protect (R2P) treats Western/Northern actors as innocent bystanders of conflicts in Southern locations “over there,” international responsiveness treats them as political actors with stakes in preserving the inequalities of the present system. My dissertation contributes by showing practically what such stakes can mean in the everyday, and how mundane practices are motivated by (or pose a challenge to) such overall narratives. In other words, shifting the overall story of international relations toward international responsiveness is a “killjoy support” practice. The more international responsiveness becomes

mainstream, the more sense it makes to pay attention to internationals' emotions and other practices, killjoying becomes less risky and change hopefully more forthcoming.

In sum, this section has demonstrated that my research contributes to both the *why* and *how* internationals' listening in peacebuilding partnerships could improve by more attention to their own emotional practices. I have suggested concrete strategies and resources for “killjoy support” practices (what Ahmed might call the “survival kits”) of practitioners who want to killjoy by making internationals visible (working *on* the game) but still stay *in* the game. As we are more used to thinking of emotions as individual experiences, it is easier to think of embodied strategies in individual terms. However, I suggest that the real challenge is how to experiment with unravelling the thick organizational and the underlying geopolitical layers of the invisibility cloak and have added a few pointers to resources for doing so. Having laid out the practical contributions of the dissertation, I turn next to the methodological ones.

## **2. Methodological innovation: emotions as practices acting in and on research**

Methodologically, my dissertation demonstrates the advantages of treating emotions as (aspects of) practices by addressing two key questions: what can be gained by paying attention to emotions as part of, first, research reflexivity and, second, the practices researchers study?

### *A) Emotions as part of research reflexivity*

First, my research provides a useful example to researchers by showing *how* they can be reflexive and pay attention to their emotions throughout the research *process*, and *why* they should. Thereby, I join feminist and interpretivist work on reflexivity (Ackerly et al. 2006; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012) which challenges understandings of reflexivity as a declaration of personal background details at the beginning or the end of the research *product*. Even though such declarations somewhat correspond to Bourdieu's claim that personal particularities shape

one's outlook and stakes, it both treats the researcher as a stable actor and often leaves aside Bourdieu's more insistent calls for attention to the more important disciplinary and general scholarly influence (2000, 10-11).

Turning to the self by treating reflexivity as practices in a process, can instead make visible such influences throughout the research. For example, I have shown elsewhere (Johansson 2016) that open questions about power can make visible the researcher's understanding of her position in relation to the researched actors; to the taken-for-granted assumptions about what (or who) is suitable as data or as resources to analyze such data; and to the benefits of asking a particular research question. Whether or not all such openings are pursued is not as important as if they are made visible – clarifying the political choices researchers make through their minute research practices. Adding attention to emotions, however, enable an even more fine-grained understanding of one's taken-for-granted assumptions and conclusions as a researcher. To illustrate, I use an excerpt of my field notes:

*[From research journal, November 2017] By taking emotions into account Ahmed adds a level of understanding to the panic I felt when I called a friend and former colleague and almost shouted into the phone what I had "discovered" through my interviews: "what the hell! It's about emotions...EMOTIONS! Like, how am I even going to be able to say what I'm writing about to [our no-nonsense boss]?!"*

*Indeed, it made my skin crawl to even think about emotions, let alone imagine saying it had any relevance to daily decisions at a peacebuilding INGO. The acute discomfort made me not send out the article with preliminary findings to anyone I interviewed for six months as I was afraid they would shut down contact or dismiss me as a lost cause. It also made my irregular casual encounters with colleagues very awkward as I was trying to articulate academically what I was finding simultaneously as I was evaluating it through my practitioner ears. To the question "what are you finding?" those ears expected conclusions immediately translatable into minor practical changes – like what kinds of local groups or themes should we (INGOs) partner with, what kind of demands should we place or not on them, etc. Just imagining that I would answer... "that we should ...care about ...our own emotions...?" made me picture raised eyebrows and heads turning away, as well as imagine I could read minds "aha, she went to the dark side," "she couldn't heck it," "she failed"...*

This excerpt includes several examples of how the findings in the dissertation apply to a researcher, in particular how breaking expectations (those of oneself and of others) can give rise to emotional consequences which work against change. First, “following surprises” is not always the pleasant treasure hunt it can sound like, but can give rise to discomfort, even panic, as the present self reacts against the imagined change in relations and attached costs. The excerpt shows that I resisted following the emotions that turned up in my data because I suspected my (practitioner) colleagues and boss would disapprove. Second, the puzzle that non-listening practices continue despite academic (and practical) evidence against them, is mirrored by the disconnect between emotions trending in academia (in IR and other disciplines), but still being considered irrelevant to practitioners. Third, the usefulness of “other killjoys” (Ahmed 2017) or “critical friends” (Holvikivi 2016) as helpful resources is illustrated by the “killjoy support” I found both in calling my friend and in the feminist literature I turned to to complement practice-approaches. Together, these examples show that reflexivity regarding one’s own emotions throughout the research process can increase the likelihood of revealing underlying assumptions and hidden characteristics that practice-approaches (in theory) tell us are part of any practices, including both the ones we study and the ones we use to do so.<sup>132</sup>

In sum, my research thus contributes methodologically by showing how and why researchers can gain from practicing reflexivity throughout the research process in a way that includes attention to their own emotions. Reflexivity is a practical strategy for receptivity, which helps researchers (individually or in groups) spot their own underlying assumptions and articulate surprising findings. As the excerpt shows, I did a lot of emotional work/regulation to

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<sup>132</sup> This is not to say that awareness and analysis of researchers’ emotions provide the answers to what particular emotions “mean.” Like other research practices, including emotions in reflexivity, may sometimes give some answers and other times not.

pay attention to emotions when I analyzed my data. In addition, I also worked to prepare for receptivity in the interviews in ways that resonate with Beausoleil's embodied strategies discussed above. For example, I worked on accepting being fragmented as *both* an INGO and a research practitioner rather than either or. I also tried to arrive on time, pause, balance my own lead with following my interviewees, etc. My aim was to enable myself to "understand differently" (Davison 1998), to make my studies count, given the long time I had taken off work to pursue them. However, as any strategy reflexivity has limits.

Despite my reflexivity work, my receptivity (ability to understand differently) is probably limited by the fact that I – as any actor – am working *in* and not only *on* the system. For example, I was not prepared to lose my job or leave my PhD-program and cannot exclude that this put up blinders where enough of my "present self" was, at least for now, successfully defended from reaching even more "outlaw" conclusions that require more radical self-challenges.<sup>133</sup> Despite such limitations, my research contributes methodologically, by providing an example of reflexivity which treats emotions as practices that part of the research process and demonstrates gains to be made by including them in the analysis.

#### *B) Emotions as part of the practices researchers study*

Second, my research demonstrates how emotions can be studied as practices, contributing methodologically to the virtually exploding fields of emotion research in several academic disciplines. Recent overviews of emotions research in international relations (Clement and

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<sup>133</sup> This point underscores calls for increased diversity in knowledge production and turning to disciplinary reflexivity as differently positioned people are likely to have different blinders. For examples in IR in addition to those previously mentioned, see David A. Lake's (2016) "intellectual confession" of his gains and limitations by being a privileged actor in "White Man's IR" For a reflexive account of a particular research tradition in IR, mainstream constructivism, see Barder and Levine (2012). For inspiration from the disciplines of anthropology and development aid, see for example Sangren (2007), Faier and Rofel (2014), and Mosse (2013). For more holistic calls to decolonize academia in general, see for example Smith (1999).

Sangar 2018a),<sup>134</sup> sociology (Bericat 2016), and anthropology (White 2017) draw attention to the importance of developing and refining new methods for studying emotions. Particularly, they call for methods that are able integrate emotion research in four ways: how *distinct* emotions work (for example, pride vs. stress); of how emotions work at different *levels* (individual-group-society); in different *temporalities* (events vs. long term); and, to varying degrees, of how insights into emotions can be gained by combining different *disciplines*. Despite the seemingly great fit with practice approaches, it is rare to find examples of emotions studied as practices<sup>135</sup> (not to mention the rarity of feminist references outside self-identified feminist research).

My research demonstrates that studying emotions as practices can be brought to bear on each of the four aspects called for in different disciplines. Briefly, my study has identified distinct emotions that practitioners express and analyzed how they connect to practices and thus to effects in different ways. For example, stress makes practitioners read reports quickly and pride makes them target their efforts towards measurable, short-term goals. Further, my research has articulated how emotional practices interweave three different “layers” of internationalists’ invisibility cloak rather than separating individuals, groups, and society into different “levels.”<sup>136</sup> Beyond these first two aspects, my research also demonstrates the benefits to the remaining two.

Regarding different temporalities, my dissertation has shown how studying emotions as practices can involve paying attention to historical paths or “lines” laid out to follow and how these then work to “orient” subjects toward certain reactions in specific moments. Concretely, I

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<sup>134</sup> As this book came out in the final months of dissertation writing, I have only engaged with the introduction, which nevertheless gives a useful update of the methodological overview of emotions research in IR.

<sup>135</sup> Janice Bially Mattern’s (2011) theorization of emotions as practices based on Schatzki has to my knowledge yet to be applied in an empirical study although she does suggest a suitable methodological approach. Ty Solomon (2016) discusses how practice approaches may benefit from a more thorough treatment of temporality and particularly in relation to emotions, in order to theorize subjectivity in similar ways to I what have done here, but does not go into depth on how to do so.

<sup>136</sup> I prefer layers to levels precisely because levels indicate separation, while layers emphasize interconnection. This way, layers is more akin to the concept of “scale” in geography, which has been proposed for IR by Sjoberg (2008).

have paid attention to the colonial continuities in peacebuilding (rather than dismissing or ignoring them). Doing so has enabled me to make sense of internationals' present orientation toward partners which positions partners as objects to be improved while leaving internationals themselves out of the picture. My previous discussion about practical change strategies also demonstrates the benefits from taking multiple temporalities into account, by adding emotional practices and resources targeting different time lines (the direct meeting, the long-term development of cultural narratives, etc.). I thus add to scholars who use practice-based approaches to temporality to understand subject formation, but whose accounts lack empirical attention to emotions (Solomon 2016, 85).

Finally, my study shows that a practice-based approach to emotions can integrate findings from different disciplines, such as cognitive science and critical feminist studies as well as political theory and empirical sociology. I thereby agree with historian Monique Scheer, who has argued that her own discipline has much to gain from studying emotions as (Bourdieuian) practices, for this reason (among others). Scheer details the methodological implications with the same enthusiasm with which Jasper exclaims, in his review of social movements research on emotions, that “[a]lmost any technique that has been used to explain cognitive meanings can be adapted to studying emotions” (2011, 22). My dissertation has shown that in-depth interviews and participant observation enable researchers to treat emotions like other practices. One can start by “zooming in” to the accounts of “competent” (dominant) actors, but one must also contextualize these and ask about power relations by “zooming out” to other (challenging) actors, and to longer time lines (Nicolini 2012, Pingeot 2018). My study thus contributes to four of the key ingredients in calls for methodological innovation in emotion study.



Wrapping up these methodological contributions of studying emotions as practices, as parts of a reflexive research process and of the object of study, I note that they directly address at least five of the six methodological challenges that Clement and Sangar (2018b, 8) lay out for emotion research in international relations. My study addresses these challenges by combining (rather than separating) the aim for generalizability with capturing “the insider’s view”; by eclectically (but not haphazardly!) “adapting traditional methods” and “borrowing methods from neighboring disciplines”; “negotiating the mediated character of emotions; clarifying the level(s) or site(s) of analysis; [and] accounting for emotions’ different temporalities.”<sup>137</sup> While their overview (2018b, 17) shows that none of their chapters study emotions as practices, my dissertation shows that doing so has direct benefits which adds methodologically to existing alternatives. My research shows that this approach not only gives rise to practical and methodological contributions, but also empirical ones, to which I now turn.

### **3. Empirical demonstrations: emotions forming internationals’ subjectivities**

My dissertation contributes an empirical demonstration of how emotions work in practice to form subjectivities,<sup>138</sup> specifically those of internationals in peacebuilding. In subsection A below, I show how establishing the role emotions play in reproducing (individual and collective) dispositions still aligned with colonial patterns adds to decolonial scholars’ efforts to particularize Western experiences. Doing so also enables us to ask new questions, such as, “Who really needs peacebuilding?” which connects to recent research on peacebuilding partnerships and internationals in humanitarianism.

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<sup>137</sup> The sixth methodological challenge Clement and Sangar (2018b, 8) identify is “narrowing down the variety of emotional phenomena in a concrete research program.”

<sup>138</sup> While I argued in Chapter 4 that invisibility as a “shared orientation,” or “shared condition,” means that internationals from different types of organizations are “sharing subjectivities,” I do not mean this is one unitary, stable subjectivity, and therefore I keep the plural.

In the following two subsections, B and C, I show how my research also adds empirically to conflict resolution literature and feminist works in IR. While both of these strands do include attention to emotions, they tend to do so only in relation to marginalized (local) actors. My research thus contributes by flipping focus to the relatively privileged internationals, opening up their emotions as new data which can help us understand peacebuilding dynamics. The final section, D, wraps up the empirical contributions with a few reflections on how my research contributes an empirical case study to recent emotion research in anthropology, and in doing so, strengthens the links between anthropology and peace research.

*A) Emotions shape subjectivities*

First, my research shows how internationals' subjectivities are produced and reproduced through emotions that are part of ordinary daily practices. This helps explain a subtle gap between findings in critical peace research in relation to practice-based studies. With this, I mean the former's well-documented evidence of remaining colonial inequalities characterizing peacebuilding long after formal decolonization (Jabri 2013), despite the latter's findings of generally nuanced views among internationals, rather than ideological support for or ignorance of such inequalities (Autessere 2014; Bliesemann de Guevara and Goetze 2012; Koddenbrock 2012). Making internationals visible as emotional actors, my research thus reveals not just that emotions generally shape subjects, but the particular political implications of *how* their subjectivities are shaped through concrete daily practices. Thereby, I address one of the weaknesses in the present "practice turn" as pointed out by self-declared "sympathetic critics" Duvall and Chowdhury (2011, 335), namely the often-lacking account of subject formation. As a consequence, my project also challenges both critical peace research and practice-based peacebuilding research to pay more attention to feminist (as well as decolonial and queer

research) findings and methodology which these strands have been criticized for ignoring (Wibben 2016b, Gruffydd Jones 2006, Wilcox 2017).<sup>139</sup>

In relation to practice-based peacebuilding research, which explicitly examines internationals' subjectivities, my study specifically contributes an empirical account of how change towards more receptive listening to local actors requires killjoying, breaking shared emotional orientations. For example, in Chapter 4 I demonstrated how Autessere's (2014) award-winning work manages to avoid treating emotions analytically, even though her description of *Peaceland* is littered with them. Despite her detailed account of how emotions such as shame, embarrassment, and eagerness permeated her efforts to fit in (and the punishment of those who did not, who were "ostracized"), Autessere does not connect these practices to the (otherwise) puzzling lack of change that she investigates. My study shows how investigating emotions as empirical data of additional (aspects of) practices enables her to do so.

In another example of practice-based research, *The Distinction of Peace*, Goetze carries out a fine-grained analysis showing that stress can be regarded as a constitutive condition of internationals' habitus or "peacebuilding sensibilities" (2017, Chapter 5). However, Goetze neither treats stress explicitly as an emotion (for example, by drawing on other emotion research or by discussing the role of emotions in forming habitus), nor does she analyze other emotions in the field. My research thus brings out additional insights from these existing works, which are

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<sup>139</sup> My challenge to critical peace research of the "hybrid peace" variety (which is critical to mainstream or liberal peace research) thus aligns with Nadarajah and Rampton's (2015) observation that hybrid peace research tends to reproduce the categories and logics of liberal peace in a way which contributes to its continuation. I add that ignoring vulnerabilities and emotional risks that the privileged (Western/Northern) actors face – including critical peace researchers themselves (see Chapter 4), is part of such reproduction. In a more recent article, Rampton and Nadarajah (2017) develop their analysis by placing the "crisis of the liberal peace" in a long-term historical perspective of colonial continuities, using a Foucauldian governmentality framework. From this, they draw similar conclusions as I do about the reproductive effects on subjectivities.

already rich contributions in themselves, demonstrating the fruitfulness of incorporating feminist work into practice-based analysis (more on this in the theoretical section below).

Finally, my empirical investigation into how emotions work to shape international subjectivities in relation to local partners links up with studies in diverse fields which ask questions about power; what actors gain and lose in such processes. For example, who really needs peacebuilding? Given the overall narrative, or background knowledge, of problems being “over there” while solutions are “over here,” the commonsense answer is Southern actors. However, Sara Helmüller (2018) recently examined mutual perceptions of both local and international peacebuilding actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Her account shows that both sides believe that “the others” lust after the money, the career opportunities, the status, etc., while either “we” are seen as committed to long-term social change. An even stronger rupture of the common sense is created by anthropologist Liisa Malkki’s (2015) account of (mostly) Finnish humanitarian actors. Malkki analyzes their “need to help” whether they stay “at home” or travel to sites of humanitarian interventions. Her analysis shows that emotions of yearning for a connection with an outside world, imagined or experienced as involving richer sensual experience and stronger relations with other people drive practices as diverse as knitting teddy bears and setting up temporary hospitals. These examples show that who gets, needs, or wants what in peacebuilding is more complicated than the commonsense answer. By treating emotions as data of practices, my dissertation has revealed that internationals also have stakes in the game, stakes which shape their everyday practices to reproduce geopolitical inequalities.

And what about changing what you want? My dissertation underlines the necessity of explicitly targeting wants and desires as practices which must adjust to fit a new, more equal (but still mostly imagined) game of peacebuilding. My research thus challenges practice-based

accounts based on Bourdieu, who mainly talks about changing desires as an unconscious process of social magic which aligns subjects with their position. As I discussed in the practical section above, it may be more helpful to turn to work in psychology on regulation of desired emotions (Tamir and Gutentag 2017). However, by empirically working with internationals' emotions as data, my research enables further research on how such adjustment can be productive of more equal relations. This is important because if the field is to change sustainably toward more equal practices, dispositions must change, and with them what players want. Koddenbrock's (2012) interviews with internationals in humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations in the DRC has shown that they often adjust their emotional practices over time.

As Koddenbrock's interviewees spend more time in the DRC, they revise their goals from changing the context to self-fulfillment. Is this what Ahmed means when she warns that making self-care (our own happiness) our main project (rather than a killjoy resource) can make us turn away from willful change work? If so, how can such processes be ruptured to enable more equal relations? In Koddenbrock's study, the spatial dislocation of internationals to "the field" led (over time) to them seemingly "too" disrupted to support change. Instead, they sought to defend and restore their superior self and settled for working *in* the system and gave up attempting change *on* the system. This raises questions of what kinds of emotional practices – safety or disruption – or mix of them, are more likely to work as "killjoy support" practices (discussed in the practical section).

In sum, my research joins these and other empirical studies<sup>140</sup> of how emotions shape subjectivities to pose political questions about power. My findings suggest that both emotional

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<sup>140</sup> For example, while Koddenbrock's example shows how moving to the field made interviewees retreat to a more traditional (less transformative) view of their role, sociologist Mimi Sheller (2004) discusses how moving around also can change our views. Investigating how "automotive emotions" (emotions around cars) contribute to collective, even national subjectivities, Sheller (drawing on Pearce) identifies the car as a relatively safe place. From

safety (to prevent defensive reactions, protecting business as usual) and emotional disruption (accepting vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty) are necessary conditions for change of power structures. Further research (discussed at the end of this chapter) can contribute clarification for how different emotional practices may work for or against change. In addition to these empirical contributions of using emotions as data to understand how subjectivities are formed, my research also contributes to research that does deal with emotions but usually focuses on the local actors: conflict resolution research and feminist IR.

*B) Internationals' emotions in conflict resolution*

My second empirical contribution comes from placing international actors at the center of my study and adds to a (relatively) small number of studies on the role of emotions in conflict dynamics, conflict resolution, and conflict mediation. In such studies, emotions are acknowledged as shaping both existing subjectivities and possibilities for change, but the focus is mainly on the “local” warring actors or broader populations associated with them. The aim is to understand how emotions of these local groups can be harnessed for conflict escalation or as a force for resolution efforts (for two recent examples, see Bramsen and Poder 2018 who draw on sociology, and Halperin and Tagar 2017 who draw on psychology).

When internationals are included as actors who also need to pay attention to their own emotions, this is usually because they are studied as mediators between warring parties. Where

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the car, one is able to “explore and fantasize [about] seductions and traumas,” which has “transformed our perception of “home”” (2004, 234-235). Perhaps the “bubble” of Peaceland that Autessere (2014) calls the international community, serves as a similar relative “safety.” If so, it may provide emotional safety while exploring the world outside the stable and predictable Western middle class contexts which produce most peacebuilding internationals (Bliesemann de Guevara and Goetze 2012, Goetze 2017). However, it can also work as a liminal space between “at home” and “away.” For example, Smirl (2012) reads three “humanitarian memoirs” with accounts of international deployments as “rites of passage” for mostly young professionals who get more power and influence through peacebuilding than they would have been able to get “at home.” This reading highlights the separation between internationals in “the field” and any “real” society, and how “work and play blur, experimentation and novelty are encouraged, and carnivalesque and ludic qualities manifest” (2012, 231). Of these examples, only Koddenbrock provides us with any indication of whether change or reproduction is more likely, showing the potential of further research.

earlier works prescribed that international mediators should simply repress, ignore and deny feelings and instead insist on “rational” deliberations devoid of them, emotional “competence” is now thought to be valuable (Picard and Siltanen 2013, Katz and Sosa 2015). Both approaches, as well as broader “cultural” approaches to peacebuilding (such as Avruch 1998, Lederach 2005, and Ramsbotham et al. 2016) suffer a significant flaw: they rarely include internationals as part of the same cultural systems as “local” actors but treat them as outsiders who can choose to get involved or not. My research adds by extending emotions research to internationals as peacebuilding actors writ large and by examining internationals as actors inside the peacebuilding game rather than as outsiders.

*C) Emotions of the privileged international*

Third, my research adds a case study of internationals’ emotions to the already rich field of critical feminist works on emotions in war and peace in IR, where focus is usually on local actors. While I value feminist works which bring out marginalized voices, show how those voices can be shaped to fit dominant structures, and/or ask questions explicitly about gender, my research does none of these things. Instead, I build on feminist insights which are as strong but less used.

My research question, which is based on concerns of marginalized local voices, flips the burden of scrutiny onto the privileged actors, asking what it would take for them to change. This flip enabled my findings of how emotional risks shape (even) privileged actors who are usually seen as powerful, as they struggle to prove competence within the present game. While I do not ask questions about gender (or for that matter, about race or sexuality), my theoretical framework uses insights based on critical studies that do, in order to understand power dynamics of

international-local relations.<sup>141</sup> Ahmed has articulated this type of feminist contribution as follows: “In reflecting about gender as a relation, feminist theorists offer critical insight into the mechanisms of power as such and, in particular, how power can be *redone* at the moment it is imagined as *undone*” (2012, emphases in original). Using such critical insights, my project thus contributes an empirical case study to feminist IR of what Ackerly and True (2006, 252) call “a second form [of] feminist normative inquiry [which is] relatively undeveloped in the field.” Flipping my focus to internationals as emotional – and thus political – actors thus contribute to understanding how such privileged subjectivities are *redone* and can be *undone* through willful efforts to fail the present game.

*D) Adding to anthropology, linking to peace research*

Wrapping up, I add a few reflections on how my empirical contributions connect to emotion research in anthropology and strengthen the links between anthropology and peace research. Although emotion research in anthropology goes back at least to the 1960s or 70s, recent reviews indicate that they share the present curiosity about how emotions work in shaping subjectivities and thus could have use for my research as a case study. For example, while anthropologists of practice (Ortner 1984) and of emotions (Lutz and White 1986) have engaged Bourdieu for decades, they seem to dismiss his understanding of both actors and methodology as too reductionist. In their view, Bourdieu reduces actors to little more than a deterministic function of their location in a grid of power relations (Ortner 2005). In addition, they think his methodological approach limits understanding to the exact same experiences one has lived through oneself (Lutz and White 1986, discussing Rosaldo). However, my study shows that integrating insights from critical feminist studies can bring out Bourdieu’s strong emphasis on

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<sup>141</sup> To be clear, I am not saying that gender, race, and sexuality are not factors in international-local relations.



emotions to address “sharp questions about the cultural shaping of subjectivities in a world of wildly unequal power relations, and about the complexities of personal subjectivities within such a world” (Ortner 2005, 46).

My research thus confirms anthropological insights that following practices can demonstrate “the work that emotions do as forms of sociality and embodiment” (Lutz 2017, 188) to “move [people we study] through the day, and thus what makes the emergent material and social worlds in which we are immersed” (2017, 189). The close relationship between my research and anthropological inquiries adds weight to the recent argument (from both sides) that peace research should open up<sup>142</sup> to ethnographic methodology (Millar 2018) and anthropological perspectives (Bräuchler 2018; Bräuchler and Naucke 2017a; Denskus and Kosmatopoulos 2015).<sup>143</sup> In fact, my dissertation shows that both disciplines can gain from such an interdisciplinary engagement.

In sum, my dissertation contributes empirically to recent research questions in several disciplines by providing a case study of power concerns in peacebuilding relations using internationals’ emotions as data. Building on the practical, methodological, and empirical contributions of my research, in the following section, I outline the theoretical contributions.

#### **4. Theoretical innovation, again and again: feminist flips failing to(ward) change...**

Finally, my dissertation contributes theoretically in three ways. First, it contributes to practice-based research by demonstrating how to integrate insights from critical feminist work to

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<sup>142</sup> Or re-open, as Denskus and Kosmatopoulos (2015) also remind us of the history of the contact between the two fields, from “Anthropology of Conflict” in the sixties (citing Robert LeVine, 1961) to present day subfield studying peacebuilding as internationally driven interventions and initiatives. Bräuchler and Naucke (2017a), also refer to Kevin Avruch’s (2007) article “A historical overview of anthropology and conflict resolution.”

<sup>143</sup> Such a rapprochement could also increase peace researchers’ readiness to engage in reflexivity (as I discussed in the methodological section), given anthropology’s much stronger familiarity with this research practice, both for individual researchers (Lutz 2017) and as institutional/disciplinary practices (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017b).

study emotions as practices and what can be gained by doing so. Second, I hope to contribute to critical feminist research (as well as efforts to decolonize and queer IR) by suggesting how insights from studying marginalized actors can be “flipped” to bring privileged actors into the analysis as objects of study, and what can be gained by that move in terms of practically useful knowledge for political change. Third, the practice-based aspects of my research bring some hope to critical approaches. More specifically, I suggest that my research shows how openings for practice-based, incremental change can highlight practical strategies for critical scholars (and readers) who are looking for ways to not only improve, but change unequal power hierarchies.

*A) Integrating feminist failure into practice-based research*

First, my research has shown how to integrate critical feminist work into a practice-based investigation. It has also demonstrated the many advantages of such an approach. Here, I include the ability to study emotions concretely as (individually and collectively) embodied practices which are social phenomena shaped by powered interactions and orientations over time. Integrating feminist insights has enabled me to paint a rich picture of ordinary peacebuilding practices and connect these with geopolitical power effects that reproduce present inequalities against the explicit intentions of key actors. It has also brought out unexpected affinities between different kinds of internationals, including not only INGOs and institutional donors, but also peace researchers, thus demonstrating the political character of all knowledge production.

By doing the analysis step-by-step in each chapter, my dissertation aims to make as clear as possible the difference between a reductionist practice-based analysis which ignores emotions and one that takes feminist insights on emotions into account. For example, while the practice-based analysis in Chapter 3 showed that internationals do listen to their local partners, integrating feminist insights highlighted how such listening is shaped (and limited) by historical orientations. My research thereby adds to practice-based accounts which address classic feminist

concerns (without engaging with feminist works. After all, feminist scholars have addressed key practice-related concerns such as the everyday, embodiment, merging the material and the discursive, and material-meaning connections, since before Bourdieu's own work on practices.

Most importantly, my dissertation pushes the boundaries of practice-based approaches' attachment to "competence" as a defining feature of practices. Drawing on feminist (and particularly queer) works on and with actors who in their beings and doings "fail" to live up to present standards, willfully or not, enables me to elucidate much more clearly what makes change possible. My study thus shows that integrating feminist theory on failure can help practice-based researchers address one of the most common criticism against them: that they are unable to account for social change (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011, Wilcox 2017). Feminist (and particularly queer) research insists that failure is not inherent in the actor, but part of the relational struggle between the actors to define the dominant rules. In other words, failure can (and should) be analyzed as (potentially) productive, rather than as inconsequential or ignored as outside of the game. In fact, by not including failure, researchers contribute to reproducing dominant structures which are not "fit for purpose," (Ralph and Gifkins 2017, 631),<sup>144</sup> what Bourdieu talked about as the risk of being seduced by practices. This conclusion further underlines the importance of researcher reflexivity, including emotions, throughout the research process as unease and surprises in drawing inside-outside boundaries may alert the researcher to such power dynamics in the field of study.

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<sup>144</sup> By focusing on willful change (towards more equal partnership relations), which provides a particular normative direction, my research posits what we could call an "alternative" (to the dominant) background knowledge from which we can evaluate different practices as "competent" or not. By doing so, it also adds to recent findings that "analysing practices separately from normative positions risks misappropriating competence and reifying practice that is not fit for purpose" (Ralph and Gifkins 2017, 631).

Failure is thus integral to understanding practice-related dynamics of power, and underlines the productive potential in drawing on critical feminist, decolonial, and queer works as traditions developed from positions deemed as “failing” accepted norms. Here, such works have enabled me to analyze international-local relationships as parallel to other powered relations, where men as a group are made invisible as the norm in patriarchy, straight people in heteronormativity, and white people in racism. My dissertation thus provides theoretical insights which can be fruitful for the burgeoning research on the role of emotions in security, war, and peacebuilding (Åhäll and Gregory 2013; Crawford 2000, 2014; Penttinen 2013; Sylvester 2012; Wibben 2016; Wilcox 2014, to mention a few) as well as on political listening (Bassel 2017; Beausoleil 2014, 2017; Dobson 2014; Dreher 2009; Firth and Farinati 2017) and receptivity (Coles 2011; Kompridis 2011; Nedelsky 2011; Norval 2011). However, most directly, the dissertation contributes theoretically to practice approaches by showing how they can integrate feminist insights on emotions and failure to create more understanding of the power struggles involved in defining competence and thus to more critical practice-based research.

*B) Flipping feminist marginalized insights to question the privileged*

My second theoretical contribution is a suggestion to critical feminist research to flip insights from work with marginalized actors and bring privileged groups into the picture. While I appreciate the importance of engaging with voices that are not heard in mainstream discourse and have much respect for the in-depth discussions in feminist academia for how to do so ethically, I suggest there are at least three reasons to flip (some of) the focus to privileged actors. One reason is that doing so can help increase understanding of a much wider range of power dynamics, expanding the use of feminist insights to other kinds of inquiry (as discussed above).

Another reason to flip the focus to – in this case – internationals is that it puts some of the burden and vulnerabilities of exposure on the privileged actor, aiming to “shift[] risk and

redistribut[e] discomfort in order to unsettle the privileges of a centralized speaking position” (Dreher 2009, 1). Finally, there is also the risk that scrutinizing, exposing, and analyzing marginalized actors continue to reproduce existing patterns of in/visibility, so that, for example, previously colonized people continue to experience research as a violent, destructive intervention (Smith 1999) regardless of the intentions of the international researcher. One way to prevent an increased focus on privileged actors to become a self-indulgent examination (Grovoqui 2006), is, for example, to articulate the research question based on concerns raised by marginalized groups or include such groups in the process of analysis rather than just as being the data.

*C) Practical optimism to inspire critical investigation and uptake*

Third, despite my criticism of practice-based approaches above, I suggest that they do not only stand to gain from engaging with critical research but also can contribute to it. In particular, I see in their focus on ordinary practices a renewed hope to provide the impetus for change much critical scholarship seems to have lost (Wibben 2016a). While classic texts laying out a critical approach included the requirement that such research must point to possible alternatives to the dominant destructive institutions and dynamics they examine, deconstruct, and denaturalize (see, for example, the discussion of Cox (1981) and Linklater (1998) in Ackerly and True (2006, 255)), critical works today seem to stop short of such suggestions (Hynek and Chandler 2013). Perhaps this is because critical scholars know that power is ubiquitous and inequality more the rule than an exception. In other words, any changes to decrease domination are seen as futile as domination often continues in different forms.

However, such a stand negates the open-endedness of human action emphasized by Arendt (1998) and almost aligns with a totalitarian or determinist view. To be less dramatic, such analyses also lack nuance. That is, critical scholarship should be able to analyze differences in and changes of domination, even assess whether some outcomes or states involve more or less

domination from a particular normative perspective. If analysis stops at detailing how destructive dominant practices are and how destructive their alternatives are (likely to be), critical scholarship has lost the key component of suggesting alternatives for change and becomes irrelevant to any practical purposes. Instead, my research shows that articulating a particular normative direction of change allows distinction between research which is “fit for [a particular] purpose” and that which is not so (Ralph and Gifkins 2017, 631). Such an articulation does not bind the researcher to that normative direction but helps clarify the implications of research. The fact that feminist research starts from a normative commitment is probably one reason for why it is generally strong in articulating alternatives for change.

Therefore, integrating feminist and practice-based approaches into other critical scholarship has the potential to strengthen the practical, normative suggestions for actions towards alternatives to present domination. Making research questions, design, and conclusions relevant to practitioners rather than only to a narrow group of policymakers also enables many more actors to take action toward change (Wibben 2016b, 143). In sum, my research shows how a practice-based approach can contribute a distinctly practical optimism to (sometimes quite abstract and pessimist) research projects with critical ambitions.

## **5. Future research**

This dissertation lays the foundations for several future research paths. One such trajectory might delve deeper into what kinds of emotions in peacebuilding partnerships make internationals more visible and help them listen more receptively to local partners. As I finished the preliminary analysis of negative emotions (that became Chapter 2), I was reading Penttinen (2013) about the empowering effects of positivity as well as organizational change research on “appreciative inquiry.” I was convinced that my analysis of practitioners’ positive emotions

would show that they were connected to transformative practices, but as Chapter 3 showed that was not the case. Indeed, the political and cognitive studies I draw on are also ambiguous. For example, Penttinen's account is countered by feminist literature (including that of Ahmed's muse Audre Lorde) which emphasizes the productive uses of anger, or unease and discomfort (as discussed in Chapter 1). Gayatri Spivak, who posed the famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak?," even encouraged the privileged Subject to "develop a certain degree of rage" (1990, 62) against the historically shaped power inequalities which positions some people on top of others, making equal dialogue less likely. The ambiguities not only concern negative or positive emotions, but whether actors are moved to change by being jolted out of their comfort zone or by being in calm and secure environments where they can let go of their need for control and defenses. While my my initially cited studies by Romanowska (2014) and Beausoleil (2014) suggest that disruption is more conducive to change, research on learning and emotional safety would suggest the opposite. More research could help deepen understandings of the role of different emotions in encouraging change in peacebuilding partnership practices.

A second avenue for future research could be to further investigate concrete strategies for emotional "killjoy support" practices dealing with the failure involved in willful change, particularly at organizational and geopolitical levels. While my research has pointed toward possible academic resources for developing such strategies, future projects could also identify concrete strategies already in use by different peacebuilding actors or experiment together with such actors in trying different alternatives.<sup>145</sup> In doing so, research could also explore whether particular "killjoy" and "killjoy support" strategies are used (and to what effects) by different

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<sup>145</sup> In putting such projects together, researchers also address material inequalities directly by seeking cooperation across North-South borders and push the boundaries for research funding by including (more) equal terms for different research partners, etc.

types of international actors, for example, by INGOs rather than donors, or by research institutions rather than INGOs. Such investigations could specify the usefulness of specific tools for “killjoy support” for different actors and situations.

Third, and most importantly, my dissertation articulates a reflexive and open-ended approach to critical peace research which might be used to infuse the field with more creative and imaginative research projects on how to dismantle hierarchical relations in peacebuilding and beyond. Like peacebuilding itself, peace research has moved through different generations and is now in a stage of critique of the critique of liberal peacebuilding (Rampton and Nadarajah 2017). At this stage, the first wave of critique against liberal peacebuilding is now itself critiqued for being as reproductive of colonial domination as liberal peacebuilding itself. However, several interventions have called for creative approaches or lateral moves (across disciplines) to avoid that critical peace research (and critical IR more broadly) gets stuck in a narrowing spiral of intra-disciplinary self-critique (Rampton and Nadarajah 2017; Sabaratnam 2013; Schmid 2018).

Specifically, in their introduction to the edited volume *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo point to the risk of reinforcing “camps” of IR as either being traditional or critical. Instead, they encourage mixing resources and sources “to look for imaginative insights” (2016, 4). My research provides one such example of mixing Bourdieu, often seen as a stale structuralist, with critical intersectional feminist scholarship, often perceived as working on the margins of IR.<sup>146</sup> I bring these together to analyze a decades-old question of power hierarchies which I pose in a different way by taking cognitive science and political theory on listening into account. My approach leads to a framework which

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<sup>146</sup> At the 2018 annual convention of the International Studies Association at least two panels were organized to encourage critical peace researchers to integrate insights from critical feminist peace research (which one could say, places the latter at the margins of the margins).



is innovative on at least three counts. First, it brings privileged actors into the analysis as political actors by flipping insights of marginalized groups, rather than allow them to stay invisible. Second, it analyzes their continuous emotional investments into unequal power structures through banal everyday actions, rather than treating emotions as individual and structures as collectives. Third, it uses reflexivity as a concern throughout the research process to highlight the political nature of all research, without making the research solely *about* the researcher. My reflexive and open-ended approach can thus lead to new understandings of how privileged actors in peacebuilding (and beyond) can contribute to change by asking questions such as “Do these practices make the privileged actors vulnerable, and if so, how – across which dimensions?”

Ultimately, my approach also encourages research in peacebuilding or IR generally to see itself as in a relation with the object of study, and therefore integrate these findings into the research design itself, making the researcher him-/herself (and his/her institution and disciplinary assumptions) vulnerable and exposed for discussion and questioning. In brief, such an approach could be summarized as “Flip, feel, and fail” (Johansson 2018). This could mean flipping who gets to influence questions, data, and analysis; paying attention to researchers feelings of surprise and unease along the way; and find ways researchers can fail reproducing taken-for-granted assumptions of their discipline and peer-group.<sup>147</sup> A reflexive and open-ended approach to peace research which integrates feminist insights can thus help us move beyond increasingly self-referential critiques to more imaginative insights.

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<sup>147</sup> Related recommendations encourage researchers to pay attention to history and material flows, focus on political processes of power rather than static ideas of differences, and integrate normative with analytical commitments (Rampton and Nadarajah 2017; Sabaratnam 2013; Schmid 2018).

## 6. Conclusion

Given people's engagement in questions of war and peace, international efforts for peacebuilding are likely to continue to enjoy broad support in the future. However, many such efforts have been found to be ambiguous in ethics and effects, and to reproduce power inequalities between "international" and "local" actors that those involved explicitly aim to dismantle. Therefore, the question of why internationals are so bad at listening to their local partners, even when they want to and know they should, is essential. While critique of the existing efforts is crucial, as a scholar-practitioner I know first-hand that it can be difficult to change their everyday practices based on such critiques. Often, critiques are either aimed at high-level policymakers or at such minute details that any action seems irrelevant to structural problems. Feminist scholar Christine Sylvester challenges critical approaches to international relations, asking "whether even they are creative enough to be in the world as it is and speak to and with it, not just to one another about it" (2016, 57). My approach takes up this challenge, by a reflexive design which allows the researcher to "be in" the world s/he studies, and to "speak to and with" its practitioners to integrate what they do and how they feel about it with the political structures they are trying to change. Ignoring either the everyday or the global risks continuing destructive peacebuilding.

On the contrary, my research uses a reflexive, open-ended, and integrative approach to show that the emotional is political and how this plays out in the ordinary work days of the international actors implementing, financing, and studying peacebuilding efforts: INGOs, donors, and peace researchers. My findings show that emotions have a great deal of connection to political structures. In fact, emotions and how practitioners share them with each other weave

the individual and structural together, as continuous, repeated, and taken-for-granted investments into one's position and identity in the existing peacebuilding game.

The finding that the emotional practices of the international, privileged Subject in this peacebuilding game work to patch up an invisibility cloak which hides the Subject from taking part in the partnership provides clues for change. Seeing such change as intentional failure to comply with the present order of things alerts us to the emotional consequences of such failures. And flipping insights from marginalized actors on the self-care needed when working for change helps us see that privileged actors who want to contribute must “choose to lose” their privileges and balance self-care with self-challenge. In other words, if privileged actors, such as internationals, are to listen more receptively to marginalized groups, such as locals, they must expose themselves and “appear” as political actors. My conclusion that the emotional is political leads us to pay attention to the vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty of privileged actors when they drop their invisibility cloak and enter politics, and thus helps us understand better the conditions for receptive listening, and for change.

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