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Local knowledges in international peacebuilding: acquisition, filtering, and systematic bias

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ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Local Knowledges in International Peacebuilding: Acquisition, Filtering, and Systematic Bias

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There is widespread consensus among peacebuilding practitioners and scholars on the importance of integrating local knowledge into the design, planning, and implementation of international peace interventions. However, the concept of local knowledge remains undertheorized, and the dynamics of local knowledge integration in international activities have not yet been fully explored. This paper reconceptualizes "local knowledge" in peacebuilding as local knowledges in the plural, highlighting seven categories of relevant local knowledge and the contestation within each. We then draw on organizational theory to identify the processes by which particular types of local knowledge become more or less likely to be incorporated into internationally led peacebuilding activities. Specifically, we argue that knowledge incorporation consists of two stages: acquisition and filtering. In both, international actors control who is able to contribute knowledges and which knowledges are recognized. Systematic biases result: knowledges that confirm previously held beliefs or that simplify complexity are incorporated more regularly. We illustrate our argument by focusing on the UN, but suggest that our findings apply to other international actors, including non-governmental organizations, and extend beyond peacebuilding.

Existe un consenso generalizado entre los profesionales y los académicos en el campo de la construcción de la paz con respecto a la importancia

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de integrar el conocimiento local en el diseño, la planificación y la implementación de las intervenciones internacionales en materia de paz. Sin embargo, el concepto de conocimiento local sigue sin estar suficientemente teorizado y la dinámica de la integración del conocimiento local en las actividades internacionales aún no se ha estudiado por completo. Este artículo reconceptualiza el ≪conocimiento local≫ en el contexto la construcción de paz como conocimientos locales en plural, y destaca siete categorías de conocimiento local relevante, así como la impugnación intrínseca a cada una de ellas. A continuación, nos basamos en la teoría organizacional con el fin de identificar los procesos mediante los cuales determinados tipos de conocimiento local tienen más o menos probabilidades de incorporarse a las actividades de consolidación de la paz lideradas internacionalmente. En concreto, argumentamos que la incorporación de nuevo conocimiento consta de dos etapas: adquisición y filtrado. En ambas etapas, los agentes internacionales controlan quién puede aportar conocimientos y qué conocimientos son reconocidos. El resultado de esto son sesgos sistemáticos ya que se incorporan con mayor regularidad aquellos conocimientos que confirman creencias previas o que simplifican la complejidad. Ilustramos nuestra hipótesis centrándonos en la ONU, pero sugerimos que nuestras conclusiones se aplican a otros agentes internacionales, incluyendo las organizaciones no gubernamentales, y se extienden más allá de la consolidación de la paz.

Il existe un consensus généralisé chez les chercheurs et professionnels de la consolidation de la paix quant à l'importance de l'intégration du savoir local dans la conception, la planification et la mise en œuvre des interventions de paix internationale. Cependant, la théorisation du concept de savoir local reste insuffisante et l'exploration des dynamiques d'intégration du savoir local dans les activités internationales lacunaire. Cet article reconceptualise le ≪ savoir local ≫ en consolidation de la paix comme des savoirs locaux au pluriel, en mettant en évidence sept catégories de savoirs locaux pertinents et la contestation qui existe au sein de chacune. Puis, nous nous fondons sur la théorie organisationnelle pour identifier les processus grâce auxquels l'intégration de certains types de savoir local dans les activités de consolidation de la paix à l'échelle internationale devient plus ou moins probable. Plus précisément, nous affirmons que l'incorporation du savoir suit deux étapes : l'acquisition et le filtrage. Dans les deux, les acteurs internationaux contrôlent les contributeurs de savoirs et la reconnaissance de ceux-ci. Des biais systématiques s'ensuivent : les savoirs qui confirment des croyances préexistantes ou qui simplifient une complexité se voient intégrés plus régulièrement. Nous illustrons notre propos en nous concentrant sur l'ONU, mais suggérons que nos résultats s'appliquent à d'autres acteurs internationaux, notamment les organisations non gouvernementales, et ne concernent pas seulement la consolidation de la paix.

Keywords: peacebuilding, peacekeeping, local knowledge, international organizations
Palabras clave: conocimiento local, construcción y mantenimiento de la paz, organizaciones internacionales
Mots clés: savoir local, consolidation/maintien de la paix, organisations internationales

Introduction

In 2010, the United Nations (UN) began employing a new category of staff in its peace operations: Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), locally hired national staff tasked with helping military peacekeepers "connect" with local populations, un-

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derstand their concerns, and support them in developing community-based self-protection systems (MONUSCO 2014, 5). The innovation occurred in the aftermath of the 2008 Kiwanja Massacre in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which saw 150 civilians killed less than a mile from a UN base (Polgreen 2008). The incident prompted a review, which concluded that UN operations needed "more local knowledge and understanding" (Kullenberg 2016, 44; Eckhard, 2019, 2021). It was part of a growing realization within the UN and the wider international peacebuilding community that their efforts would not be successful or legitimate—and worse, might cause harm—if they lacked an understanding of the populations they served and the contexts in which they worked. In this sense, CLAs constitute one example of increasing efforts to obtain a particular type of knowledge—*local* knowledge—now considered essential for effective peacebuilding.

Among scholars, too, there is general consensus on the importance of integrating local knowledge into the design, planning, and implementation of international peace interventions (Chandler 2005; Richmond 2014; von Billerbeck 2016; Autesserre 2021). Local knowledge is recognized as vital both for intervention effectiveness (identifying and understanding local challenges is key to developing adequate responses) and for avoiding unintended negative consequences, including harm to local communities and security risks to peacebuilders. Despite this "local turn" in the study of peacebuilding, however, the concept of local knowledge and the dynamics of local knowledge integration into international activities remain undertheorized.[1] This article addresses both gaps by bringing a more nuanced understanding of local knowledge as local *knowledges*—in the plural—into conversation with organizational theories of decision-making. This allows us to investigate which types of local knowledge are more or less likely to be incorporated into internationally led peacebuilding activities and thus check for systematic biases in the gathering and integration of local knowledges by international actors.

We proceed in three steps. First, we describe the evolution of practitioner and scholarly understandings of peacebuilding from top-down international interventions toward greater commitment to tailoring peacebuilding to local circumstances. This shift has led to an increased but under-theorized recognition of the need for local knowledge in international peacebuilding organizations (IPBOs).

Second, we re-frame local knowledge in peacebuilding as local knowledges, in the plural, identifying four types of local knowledge relevant to peacebuilding. Three of these—geographical, institutional, and ideational knowledges—can pertain either generally to the host state or specifically to a particular conflict. The fourth type pertains to dynamics among the IPBOs addressing a conflict. Conceptualizing local knowledges in the plural allows us to acknowledge the fundamentally contested nature of knowledge: instead of a single "truth," each local knowledge type is likely to include multiple understandings and narratives.

Third, we use organization theory to conceptualize how and when IPBOs incorporate various types of local knowledge in their decision-making—or fail to do so. Specifically, we draw on the "garbage can" theory of organizational decision-making (Cohen et al. 1972) to develop a two-step theoretical framework of local knowledge incorporation in international peacebuilding. The garbage can model specifies that decision-making processes in organizations are highly contingent: They depend on which *participants* attend a particular *choice opportunity*

[1] See Eckhard (2021) for an exception.

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because individuals in an organization differ both in the *problems* they identify and the *solutions* they advocate. Choice opportunities "are occasions when an organization is expected to produce behavior that can be called a decision," for example, "[c]ontracts must be signed; people hired, promoted, or fired; money spent; and responsibilities allocated" (Cohen et al. 1972, 3). Decisions are taken when at least one of the solutions advocated matches a problem identified at a particular choice opportunity. In this way, the garbage can model unpacks the shorthand "IO decision-making" into an embodied process that includes actors, a space for decision-making, and a matching process between the subject of the decision-making and the information that influences what decision is eventually made. It therefore encompasses the variables that we are interested in and the uncertainty and inconsistency that complicate the relationships between those variables.

We argue that in peacebuilding contexts, both problem definition and solution identification often require local knowledges and that the incorporation of such knowledges involves two steps. First, IPBOs must *acquire* local knowledges, which may occur through observation, interaction with local knowledge holders, and/or inviting local knowledge holders into a choice opportunity. Second, during the choice opportunity, acquired local knowledges are *filtered* through self-censoring and sidelining. Only local knowledges that are not filtered out can shape the decision made at the choice opportunity.

Critically, local knowledge incorporation in IPBOs is neither fully rational nor fully random. It occurs through a particular set of mechanisms, and our examination of these mechanisms enables us to identify systematic biases in IPBOs' local knowledge incorporation. It also allows us to highlight how politics and power influence this process, which tends to be overlooked in other applications of the garbage can theory. We identify (1) patterned (dis)incentives for IPBO members to acquire certain types of local knowledges, notably excluding those introducing new complexity or contradicting current understandings; (2) selectivity in which new local knowledge holders IPBOs admit to choice opportunities, favoring known interlocutors and those perceived to be "similar" to them; and (3) concentrated decision-making power among international staff who have professional and personal biases toward some local knowledge types and against others.

We conclude by discussing the generalizability of our findings and outlining a new research agenda. Our typology and theoretical framework represent stylized versions of highly complex phenomena. We expect them to hold across a variety of actors and interventions, but further studies may usefully extend our identification of local knowledge types; investigate whether acquisition and filtering dynamics vary systematically by international actors, as well as the agency of local actors in these processes; and trace how these processes change over time in response to policy imperatives and evolving global norms.

We build our argument inductively, focusing on the UN as a key IPBO. As mentioned, however, we expect our core insights to apply to other international actors—including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs)—and to extend beyond peacebuilding to other forms of intervention: scholars of development, conservation, and public health, among others, have similarly identified local knowledge needs (Agrawal 1995; Bicker et al. 2019). Methodologically, we draw on existing literature, UN documentation, our UN research experience (including 372 interviews in five peacekeeping missions and in UN offices in New York, Geneva, and Nairobi), and a two-day interactive workshop with eighteen practitioners and academics.[2]

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Our study makes several contributions. Conceptually, we deepen scholarly understandings of what local knowledge in peacebuilding is—or, rather, what local knowledges are. Furthermore, we innovate by drawing on organizational theory to elucidate how, when, and with what biases international actors incorporate local knowledges into their decisions, providing a range of illustrative examples. Recognizing these processes helps explain the gap between IPBOs' stated commitments to more locally tailored approaches and their actual activities, while also bringing politics and power more explicitly into theories of organizational behavior. Beyond academia, these insights are relevant for peacebuilding practitioners, who tend to treat local knowledge as a black box, with little attention paid to the specific types of knowledge they are seeking and the processes by which they incorporate local knowledges into their work—or fail to do so.

Local Knowledge Needs in Peacebuilding

Scholarly and practitioner understandings of how to undertake effective peacebuilding have evolved significantly since the term was coined in the early 1990s (UN 1992), shifting from internationally led, top-down approaches to more locally tailored ones. This shift entails a vastly increased need for local knowledge.

After the Cold War ended, Western-led liberal peacebuilding gained ascendancy as a response to intra-state conflicts. This paradigm assumed that legitimate institutions were largely absent in post-conflict contexts and that stable and lasting peace was best realized through democratization led by external actors, including the UN, international financial institutions, democratic states, and INGOs (Paris 2004, 19). Within this paradigm, local knowledge needs were limited. International intervenors were envisioned as holders of vital expertise in democratization and liberalization—expertise that local actors were presumed to lack—thanks to their peacebuilding experience in multiple locations and their (usually Western) cosmopolitan education (Goetze and Bliesemann de Guevara 2014, 777–8). This knowledge is technical, thematic, and abstracted from particular places and periods—what Scott (1998) refers to as "techne"—and therefore deemed objective and universal (see also Nouwen 2014). Transposing this expertise to specific local circumstances required only basic local knowledge, what Rubinstein et al. (2008, 545) call "travelers' advice." This includes elementary factual knowledge (e.g., population distributions or sites of major economic activities); a rudimentary understanding of local history and politics; some language knowledge (often outsourced to translators); and a relatively thin understanding of local customs.

Since the 2000s, however, top-down approaches to peacebuilding have attracted extensive criticism. The central objection is that externally driven peacebuilding undermines the prospects for sustainable peace by privileging the ideas and interests of external actors while neglecting the need for host state institutions to enjoy domestic legitimacy and for local populations to support and participate in peacebuilding processes (Brown et al. 2010, 101; Mac Ginty 2010, 408; von Billerbeck 2016). Top-down peacebuilding is also condemned for "its promotion of essentially Western values and its belief in the universalism of liberal goals" (Mac Ginty 2010, 394) and a concurrent tendency to ignore context-specific local issues

[2]The workshop took place on December 8–9, 2022 at Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen, Germany, with the aim of discussing, validating, and enhancing our findings.

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and concerns (e.g., Autesserre 2010; Rynning 2012). A new scholarly consensus has thus emerged that effective peacebuilding must be responsive to local conflict dynamics and take into account the activities, needs, and norms of local actors (Barnett 2006; Mac Ginty 2007; Donais 2009; Peterson 2010; Roberts 2011; Cohen 2014).[3] Practitioners also routinely acknowledge the importance of more localized peacebuilding and collaborating with national and local partners (OECD 2005, 2007; World Bank 2011; see also Hellmüller 2014; Boutellis et al. 2020; Allen 2021).

These locally tailored approaches exponentially increase the local knowledge needs of peacebuilders, as they require detailed, context-specific knowledge—which Scott (1998) calls "mētis," both distinct from and an indispensable complement to "techne"—of the conflicts they are seeking to address. Despite their ascendance, however, academic and practitioner discourses around local knowledge in peacebuilding lack precision. One ambiguity is the definition of "local," which is used to cover a range of geographic spaces, including the national, subnational, regional, community, municipal, and neighborhood level within countries hosting peacebuilding activities. We use "local" as a descriptor conveying an association with or embeddedness within these various spaces (e.g., local institutions, local languages) (Olwig and Hastrup 1997), but also explicitly recognize a continuum from national to conflict-specific local knowledges as well as variations in how widely "local" knowledges are held. The other ambiguity pertains to the definition of "local knowledge" itself, which we address in the next section.

Multiple Local Knowledges: A Typology

In peacebuilding, the term "local knowledge" is convenient shorthand for a complex set of information about and understandings of local actors, histories, cultures, political economies, and normative, political, economic, military, and social dynamics. Our aim is not to narrow this definition but rather to expose its diversity, shifting the analytical focus from "local knowledge" to "local knowledges." Importantly, the unifying characteristic of these knowledges lies in their subject matter—they are about something within or connected to a locality—rather than their holders: Specific local knowledges may or may not be restricted to persons from a particular locality. When investigating local knowledge acquisition by IPBOs, the question of who can hold such knowledges is central to the inquiry and should not be settled by definition.

In this section, we expand an earlier distinction between informational and relational dimensions of local knowledge (Eckhard 2021) and draw on academic and practitioner literature as well as our collective field and interview experiences to identify four broad types of local knowledge relevant to peacebuilding: geographical, ideational, institutional, and IPBO ecosystem. Knowledges within the first three types can range from general (broadly about or applicable to the host country) to conflict-specific (relating to one particular armed conflict, potentially among several in the country) (Figure 1). These four categories are analytically distinct but may overlap in practice, and further research may reveal additional (sub)categories.

[3]Some go further, advocating for locally-*led* peacebuilding, in which local actors conceive and undertake peacebuilding activities and international actors merely provide support (Autesserre 2021; Cassin and Zyla 2023). Yet while many IPBOs have rhetorically recognized a need for their activities to enjoy "local ownership," their implementation of this commitment has typically been incomplete, and few have been willing to cede leadership fully to local actors (von Billerbeck 2015).

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	General	Conflict-specific
Geographical knowledges	◄	►
Ideational knowledges	◄	►
Institutional knowledges	◄	►
IPBO ecosystem knowledges		X

Figure 1: Types of local knowledges.

Importantly, a multiplicity of local knowledges exists *within* each category, reflecting both the complexity of the subject matter (i.e., multiple relevant institutions, ideations, and geographies) and the frequently contested nature of local knowledge. Where one observer sees an armed group deploying, others may see a self-defense militia forming, a criminal gang seizing territory, a displaced population returning with weapons, or an armed nomadic community moving to new pastures. Several (or all) of these interpretations may be accurate simultaneously. However, not all local knowledge claims are necessarily valid, since the concept of knowledge includes an element of factual accuracy. Misinformation and rumor, even if believed by a local actor, are not local knowledge.[4] For example, a resident who believes that a particular armed group has entered an area where none of the group's members are present is mistaken rather than holding a different local knowledge. Yet while error is possible, definitive truths are rare—perhaps especially in (post-)conflict environments. Effective peacebuilding typically depends more on understanding the various perspectives on a contested issue (i.e., gathering multiple local knowledges about it) than on seeking a single, authoritative truth (local knowledge in the singular).

Turning to our typology, geographical knowledges are necessary for peacebuilders to orient themselves within their physical surroundings and to tailor their activities to the exigencies of the material environment. General geographical knowledge includes information about host state topography, climate, natural resources, population density and distribution, and infrastructure. Conflict-specific geographical knowledge includes information about the location, movement, and resource bases of armed actors, the places experiencing or at risk of violence, and the whereabouts and displacement of conflict-affected civilians. These knowledges help IPBOs track patterns of violence and humanitarian need, identify sites of potential flare-ups, and understand the resource bases that enable the emergence and survival of armed groups.

The panoply of maps on the walls of most peacekeepers' offices attests to the importance attributed to geographical knowledges. In 2021/2022, the UN Missions in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), respectively, produced 6,501 and 4,515 maps (UN General Assembly 2022a, 78; UN General Assembly 2022b, 70). Peacebuilding actors invest considerable resources in acquiring and updating these knowledges. UNMISS, for example, analyzed geospatial data covering 644,329 km^2 to maintain the topographic and thematic layers of its maps (UN General Assembly 2022a, 78). In DRC, Sudan, Mali, Somalia, and Central African Republic (CAR), moreover, the UN Security Council has authorized small mobile groups of staff (Groups or Panels of Experts) to gather and analyze information on armed and criminal groups, including their locations and supply routes (UNDPPA 2022).

Ideational knowledges relate to local ways of thinking about and understanding the physical and social world. Without these knowledges, IPBOs struggle to engage with local actors, understand their motivations, secure their cooperation, or predict their reactions to IPBO activities. General ideational knowledges include comprehension of commonly spoken languages, prevalent constructions of social communities, and local understandings of history, social customs, and norms.

[4]Thanks to a workshop participant and an anonymous reviewer who stressed the issue of misinformation and rumor.

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Sometimes referred to as cultural awareness, these knowledges have a "multiplying effect in the implementation of a mission, positive when present and negative when absent" (Bellou 2014, 583). General ideational knowledges also include awareness of sub-cultural divergences within the host state, such as how age, gender, religion, ethnicity, wealth, and urban/rural location may shape individuals' understandings of the world (Grant and Zyla 2021).

Conflict-specific ideational knowledges relate to how combatants and conflict-affected communities perceive a conflict, psychological factors shaping why particular groups and individuals fight,[5] and how local actors understand peace, justice, and legitimate authority (Fisk 1990; da Costa 2013; Kakar 2014; Cassin 2022). They also include understandings of how rumor, misinformation, and disinformation shape the behavior of armed actors and conflict-affected communities. These knowledges also include the stigmas that exist due to participation (or lack thereof) in the conflict and in particular in atrocities, as well as the role of the supernatural and spirituality, which can influence beliefs about physical security, protection, and harm during conflict as well as reconciliation afterward (Baines 2010; Njoku and Dery 2021). Without these knowledges, IPBOs cannot effectively negotiate with or mediate among conflict parties, facilitate combatant demobilization, or support peace and reconciliation initiatives.

Institutional knowledges relate to the entities structuring social, political, and economic life in the host state. These institutions distribute power and authority among local actors and shape the context within which IPBO activities take place, influencing both the feasibility and the likely success of particular initiatives. General institutional knowledges identify the main political, economic, and social institutions of the host state and how they function, including the national and subnational political system, the distribution of tasks and powers across government and bureaucracies, and the actors occupying or vying for positions of authority (Grant and Zyla 2021). Other relevant institutions include the judicial system, security and police forces, financial institutions, labor unions, business and press associations, NGOs and civil society organizations, and influential religious bodies. Of interest are not only the formal tasks and rules of these institutions but also their informal elements: the unofficial distribution of power within and among them; the vested interests they serve or challenge; the tacit political settlements among local elites they embody; and how they confer or withhold bargaining advantages among local communities (Bräutigam et al. 2002; Kildornay and Reilly-King 2013; Werker and Sen 2021; Heaven et al. 2022). In addition, general institutional knowledges include gender- and age-based institutions in the country—for example, how patriarchy or seniority inform the distribution of power and influence in society.

Conflict-specific institutional knowledges reveal the identity, structure, and internal dynamics of actors participating in the conflict and/or seeking to resolve it. This usually includes government actors, national security services, political parties, and religious institutions, blurring the line between general and conflict-specific institutional knowledges. However, conflict-specific institutions also often include multiple non-governmental armed groups (Mamiya 2018) and unarmed actors. Religious leaders (Kakar 2014), traditional authorities (Appiah-Thompson et al. 2022), and "grass-roots" community organizations (Krause 2018) may play pivotal roles in violence prevention and conflict mediation—or in fueling conflict. Failure to recognize and engage such local partners can undermine international peacebuilding efforts (Apsani et al. 2019; Autesserre 2021). Beyond recognizing their relevance, peacebuilding organizations require information about these actors' aims, leadership structure, strength, resource bases, and relations with each other (Connolly and Mincielli 2019).

Finally, IPBO ecosystem knowledges entails understanding dynamics among the frequently large number of international peacebuilding actors in a particular

[5]Examples include constructions of masculinity (Duriesmith 2016) and feelings of shame and the need for belonging (Mitton 2015).

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(post-)conflict setting, including intergovernmental, non-governmental, and state actors. Over time, particular international actors may establish themselves as central to addressing specific dimensions of a conflict or as uniquely positioned to provide particular resources or permissions (Campbell 2008). For example, the Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio emerged as a key mediator in Mozambique's peace process (Bartoli 1999). Some individuals may also gain reputations as particularly competent international peacebuilders (Cain et al. 2004; Moore 2013) and/or as able to "span boundaries" between communities by leveraging identity, tradition, and custom to develop trust, respect, and dialogue (Gopin 2009, 4).

Given the vast range of relevant local knowledges and the complexity, contestation, and overlap within and between the four types identified above, IPBOs cannot aspire to comprehensive local knowledge. Inevitably, they will work with only a subset of potentially relevant local knowledges. In the next section, we develop a theoretical framework that captures the two steps of local knowledge incorporation in IPBOs and helps identify systematic biases in which local knowledges are incorporated into IPBO decision-making and which are excluded.

Local Knowledges Incorporation: A Theoretical Framework

To conceptualize how different types of local knowledge are (not) incorporated in IPBO decision-making, we begin by recognizing that IPBOs are indeed organizations—that is, entities with formal structures that link individual members, define institutional identities (Wry et al. 2011, 449), and shape collective processes, activities, and interactions (March and Olsen 1998; Pye 2005, 35). More specifically, most IPBOs are project organizations: subsidiary units of larger, more permanent entities that bring together specialists employed to complete defined tasks. UN peace operations, World Bank country offices, programs run by international NGOs, and local offices of governmental aid agencies are all examples of project organizations. Most IPBOs are geographically distant from their "parent" organization: They are based in the peacebuilding host state but are mandated by and report to a parent organization headquartered in another country. Internationally recruited staff play a central role in bridging this geographical distance, representing the parent organization locally, managing operations for it, and providing it with "on the ground" analysis and advice (Weller and Yi-Chong 2010). We argue below that this positioning makes international staff powerful gatekeepers in determining which local knowledges are incorporated into organizational decisions. In addition, IPBOs often recruit staff locally, partly to fill capacity needs, but also, as we explore below, for local knowledge advantages (Eckhard 2019, 2021; Coleman 2020b, forthcoming; Eckhard and Steinebach 2021; Eckhard and Parizek 2022).

Because IPBOs are organizations, organizational theory applies to them—and one central insight of organizational theory is that organizations rarely make decisions (i.e., match identified problems and perceived solutions) according to fully rational processes. Instead, the garbage can theory of organizational decision-making describes conditions of "organized anarch[y]" marked by three key features: (1) problematic preferences, (2) unclear technology, and (3) fluid participation (Cohen et al. 1972).

Preferences are problematic in that the definition of organizational problems and goals is frequently ambiguous, which means that understandings of these problems and goals can vary among organization members.

Unclear technology refers to decision-makers' uncertainty about organizational rules, structures, and potential veto players, meaning that even members who agree on problems and goals may differ on how the organization should address them and thus rely on "trial-and-error,...the accidents of past experience..., and pragmatic invention" (Cohen et al. 1972, 1).

Fluid participation captures the fact that the number and identity of individuals taking part in organizational decisions fluctuates from case to case, as does the amount of time and effort they put into particular decisions. This is critical precisely because problematic preferences and unclear technology allow for variance among

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members of an organization: If there is no clear organizational goal and no unambiguous way of moving the organization toward it, different members have scope to advocate for different decisions within their organization. In this way, despite their shared organizational identity, individual members frequently vary in both the *problems* they identify and the *solutions* they advocate—which may, for example, reflect parochial (e.g., subunit or individualistic) interests and operating procedures instead of close problem analysis (Allison 1969). Consequently, organizational decisions are contingent upon the *participants* in any particular *choice opportunity*: What the organization decides to do depends on who participates in the decision-making moment, which problems these individuals identify, which solutions they advocate, and whether there is a (perceived) match among available problems and solutions.

We bring local knowledges into the garbage can model of IPBO decision-making by recognizing that in peacebuilding, both problems and solutions have local knowledge dimensions. Understanding an impediment to sustainable peace typically involves general and conflict-specific geographical knowledges (where is a problem located? how does it interact with other features of the material environment?), ideational knowledges (how do different local actors perceive the problem? whom do they hold responsible for it?), and institutional knowledges (how does the problem grow from and affect host state institutions and conflict actors?). IPBO ecosystem knowledges may also be relevant if peacebuilder activities or behaviors help create the problem. Solutions, meanwhile, should reflect and ideally harness local geographical realities, ideational contexts and resources, institutional particularities, and the power and resources of IPBOs.

Retaining the garbage can model's emphasis on the problems and solutions participants bring into choice opportunities, we conceptualize local knowledges incorporation in IPBO decision-making as a two-stage process. First, *acquisition* refers to the processes by which local knowledges are brought into a particular choice opportunity. Second, *filtering* shapes which of the acquired local knowledges are voiced and listened to during the choice opportunity. We explore each stage below, drawing on empirical examples from UN peace operations, and we argue that each is prone to systematic biases reflecting the incentives of participants in a choice opportunity and power relations among them. These biases are probabilistic rather than absolute—they make it systematically more or less likely that particular types of local knowledge will be incorporated into IPBO decisions without guaranteeing either outcome—but they are nonetheless significant in shaping IPBO decision-making.

Our mobilization of the garbage can model also incorporates an explicitly political dimension by highlighting power differentials among choice opportunity participants. We conceive of power here as a form of control over internal processes and gatekeeping within organizational contexts, rather than compellence (Barnett and Duvall 2005; Haas 2015). We thus propose a new theoretical framework of local knowledge incorporation in IPBOs (Figure 2) while also adding a power dimension to the garbage can model that has so far been lacking.

For simplicity of exposition, we assume here that there is a single, well-identified choice opportunity for which local knowledges may be acquired and at which they are filtered. In reality, given the size and complexity of most IPBOs, decision-making may involve multiple sequential or overlapping choice opportunities, each subject to acquisition and filtering dynamics, and thus the process is not necessarily linear or progressive.[6] There may also be "leakage" along the way: As decision-making moves up an organizational hierarchy, some information may accidentally be omitted, some reports may not be seen by relevant decision-makers, and complex, detailed knowledges may be progressively distilled into fewer and fewer bullet points that are stripped of detail but propose a clear set of actions.[7] Nevertheless, our model identifies the essential stages of knowledge incorporation, and we revisit our simplifying assumption in our conclusion.

[6]We thank an anonymous reviewer for underscoring this point.

[7]Thanks to our workshop participants who insisted on this dimension of the politics of local knowledges integration.

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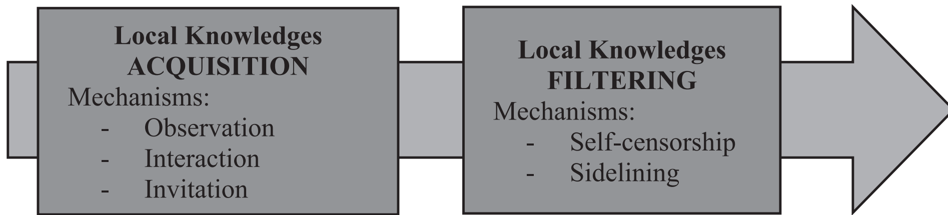

Figure 2: Two stages of local knowledges incorporation.

Acquisition

The first step in IPBOs' local knowledge incorporation is acquisition. From an organizational perspective, an element of local knowledge is acquired—and thus available for incorporation into an IPBO decision—if one or more holders of that knowledge element are present at the relevant choice opportunity. Acquisition can take place via three distinct but not mutually exclusive pathways: (1) IPBO staff gather the knowledge by *observation*; (2) IPBO staff gather the knowledge through *interaction with local actors* external to the organization; and (3) IPBO staff *invite* other actors who already hold the knowledge into the choice opportunity. We explore each pathway in turn, identifying its dynamics and constraints, before addressing the power structures and potential biases that can lead to the systematic privileging of certain types of local knowledges over others.

Observation

Regular participants in IPBO choice opportunities bring with them a potentially wide range of local knowledges they have acquired by direct observation during their professional and private activities in the host state. Some international IPBO personnel have explicit observation duties and virtually all routinely observe local actors and processes during work meetings, site visits, and missions. For example, in 2020/2021, MONUSCO's uniformed personnel conducted 232 daily military patrols, a total of 34,600 police patrols, and 164 joint conflict assessment missions, in addition to deploying aerial observation assets, including three unmanned aerial vehicles (UN General Assembly 2021). The mission's civilian personnel activities included thirty-three human rights monitoring and investigation missions, monitoring visits to twenty community violence reduction projects, "advice and mentoring sessions" for judicial authorities, thirteen "prison coordination meetings" with provincial and national authorities, and weekly or daily mentoring of directors and supervisors of high-risk prisons (UN General Assembly 2021, 45). In addition to these formal activities, IPBO staff informally observe their daily environments, registering indicators of social and economic trends (e.g., queues at petrol stations indicating shortages) and sometimes witnessing major developments such as protests or armed attacks.

Direct observation can provide extensive geographical knowledges of a local area, including of both the general physical environment and the conflict setting. As noted above, missions' map production mobilizes geospatial data and, in some cases, expert observer teams. Observation can also yield general and conflict-specific institutional knowledge. MONUSCO's court and prison visits, for example, provided staff essential insights into the local judicial and penal system, while a night-vision-equipped drone flying above a suspected armed camp enabled MONUSCO to count huts and estimate the number of people on site.[8]

However, there are important constraints on the local knowledges IPBO staff can gain by observation. First, observation depends on access. IPBO staff must be phys-

[8]Author's interview, Goma, DRC, June 22, 2017.

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ically able to observe events, actors, and processes. The frequency and duration of observation, its scope (e.g., only public debate or also behind-the-scenes activities), and how structured observation is (e.g., orchestrated or impromptu) also affect local knowledge gathering. Consequently, IPBO staff's ability to gather local knowledges by observation varies both with local actors' willingness to accept their presence and with logistical and security constraints on their movement. International staff, who may be visibly foreign to the host state and are frequently subject to more stringent organizational security restrictions than national staff, often face particular access challenges.

Second, observation typically requires auxiliary skills. Language skills are necessary whenever observation includes reviewing written materials or verbal exchanges, speeches, and broadcasts. Beyond language comprehension, observation also requires socio-linguistic competence to detect non-verbal cues, allusions, and subtexts, for example, to understand when a speaker is sincere, joking, or deliberately insulting. Again, this constraint especially affects international staff. As one MINUSCA official explained: "I laugh often when we go to the field offices, and we see our heads of office participating in hour-long meetings which happen in Sango. They just sit there and it's like, 'You don't understand what's being said'."[9] Language assistance from national staff can help address this constraint, but there is a risk of information loss in translation.

Third, observation requires analytical skills to interpret visual or audible phenomena. This applies even to sophisticated observation tools: As one MONUSCO official noted, "drone pictures on their own are not that useful—you also have to know what kind of people these are."[10] A local staff member of the UN mission in Cyprus noted that international peacekeepers tended to overreact to observed confrontations between local troops and civilian farmers because they did not understand that such confrontations are regular posturing events.[11] A MINUSCA local staff member encapsulated the constraint insufficient cultural or historical understanding imposes on observation as follows: "the saying is that a foreigner has big eyes but sees nothing. When you are a stranger in a country, you can see but you won't understand."[12]

Interaction

In addition to daily informal interactions with local citizens, many IPBO staff spend considerable time meeting and communicating with local officials, opinion leaders, stakeholders, and other local actors external to the organization. They bring the local knowledges gathered through these interactions into the choice opportunities they attend.

In peacekeeping, both civilian and uniformed personnel are explicitly tasked with engaging local interlocutors and analyzing the content of these interactions to identify problems and possible solutions. For example, in the 2021/2022 budget year, MONUSCO staff participated in, among others, five high-level meetings with the national government on civilian protection, sixteen meetings with armed groups on child soldiers, thirty-six government and ministry-level consultations on human rights, and monthly meetings on the national program for stabilization and reconstruction (UN General Assembly 2021). Such interactions provide civilian peacekeepers opportunities to learn general and conflict-specific institutional knowledge, including both how institutional arrangements are supposed to work in the host country and who actually exercises influence within them, over whom, and through what means. Uniformed peacekeepers are also instructed to learn from local interlocutors: "sustained dialogue with the local population, such as internally

[9] Author's interview, Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR), June 5, 2019.

[10] Author's interview, Goma, DRC, June 22, 2017.

[11] Author's interview, Nicosia, Cyprus, September 2022.

[12] Author's interview, Bangui, CAR, June 8, 2019.

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displaced, refugees, women and children, is necessary to identify the threats posed to them and their vulnerabilities" (UN DPO/DFS 2012, 106). These types of interactions can yield important conflict-specific geographical, ideational, and institutional knowledges.

However, there are also constraints on the local knowledges IPBO staff can gather through interaction. First, interaction depends on identifiability and access: IPBO staff seeking particular local knowledge elements must be able to identify the relevant knowledge holders, but they cannot learn from individuals and groups they cannot reach due to the access restrictions described above.

Second, local knowledge gathering by interaction requires mutual trust. Knowledge holders must trust IPBO staff enough to be willing to share their knowledge, especially when information is sensitive (e.g., details about militia movements or behind-the-scenes electoral deal-making), and sharing it could have negative repercussions for them. International staff sometimes enjoy trust from local interlocutors because they are perceived as neutral outsiders,[13] but where local knowledge holders mistrust foreigners, national staff may be required to facilitate interaction (Coleman forthcoming). As a UN official in Côte d'Ivoire reported, "Knowing that the area we went in was against UN… [f]or the culture knowledge I took my assistant who is Ivorian and who speaks the same language to break the ice" (Eckhard 2021, 306). Equally, IPBO staff must trust local knowledge holders in order to learn from them: Where there are concerns about being misled or presented with biased information, IPBO staff may reject knowledge elements that are offered. Both dynamics may be (somewhat) mitigated by building relationships of trust over time with particular local actors who are considered experts or "in the know."

Third, even more so than observation, interaction requires auxiliary skills. Speaking with, listening to, and working with local knowledge holders requires not only adequate language skills (or reliable, neutral interpreters who capture nuance), but also sufficient cultural knowledge to understand the meanings attached to particular phrases, references, or histories.

Invitation

The third mechanism of local knowledges acquisition consists of inviting local knowledge holders into a choice opportunity. Invitees can be IPBO staff not previously present (e.g., national staff or staff from another unit) or international or national actors from outside the IPBO, and they may be invited on an ad hoc basis (for one choice opportunity) or on a longer-term basis. Sometimes, local knowledge is acquired serendipitously, as an unintended consequence of inviting somebody for another reason. Often, however, invitation is highly strategic, deliberately opening an otherwise closed internal choice opportunity to specific individuals because of the local knowledges they are perceived to hold. Indeed, inviting knowledge holders can be especially useful for quickly obtaining detailed local knowledges considered consequential for certain decisions, including complex institutional and ideational knowledges that are difficult for regular choice opportunity participants to acquire by observation and interaction and "insider" IPBO ecosystem knowledges. Invitation also entails a more explicit signaling to knowledge holders that their knowledges are valued and sought holistically, compared to interaction, where IPBO staff seek and transmit only a particular segment of their knowledges.

However, like observation and interaction, the process of acquiring local knowledges through invitation includes important constraints. First, deliberate invitation depends on IPBO staff recognizing a local knowledge gap prior to the choice opportunity. Second, invitation requires the accurate identification of relevant local knowledge holders and a strategic decision by IPBO staff to invite these individuals. Such decisions reflect IPBO staff judgments about the value of the local knowl-

[13] Author's interview, Bangui, CAR, June 5, 2019.

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edge and the reliability and trustworthiness of the knowledge holder, generating a complex "politics of whose knowledge counts, whose knowledge is acted upon, and what is even considered to be knowledge" (Jones and Lühe 2021, 3). Invitation is also shaped by more practical considerations, including time constraints on decision-making, costs of facilitating an invitee's attendance, whether identified local knowledge holders have security clearance to participate in a choice opportunity, and whether their participation might cause a diplomatic incident or raise accusations of bias. Finally, invited actors must be available and willing to participate in the choice opportunity.[14]

Power and Biases in Acquisition

The mechanisms just described can be very effective in allowing IPBOs to acquire local knowledges relevant for a choice opportunity, especially when used in combination with each other. However, acquisition inevitably interacts with power hierarchies within an IPBO. Given their status in project organization hierarchies, international staff are most reliably present at choice opportunities. Consequently, their observations and interactions are critical to IPBO local knowledge acquisition—yet as noted, they face particular constraints for both mechanisms. International staff also typically determine which, if any, actors to invite to choice opportunities, thus acting as gatekeepers to local knowledge acquisition by invitation.

Often in combination with these power dynamics, the constraints each acquisition pathway entails generate high risks of systematic biases for or against certain knowledge types. As mentioned, these biases are probabilistic. Our discussion thus does not make deterministic claims, but reflects overall patterns of biases that hold over time and across missions.

First, IPBO local knowledge acquisition is likely to be biased toward knowledges about and/or held in urban areas. Most IPBOs (and virtually all international IPBO staff) are based in cities or towns, making observation in these areas, interaction with their populations, and invitations of urban-based local knowledge holders relatively easy. By contrast, remote and rural areas are often difficult for IPBO staff to reach: some are designated as "no-go" areas due to security risks (Duffield 2010; Roth 2014), and many present logistical challenges such as being accessible only sporadically or at high cost (e.g., by helicopter or with military escort). Opportunities for local knowledge acquisition through observation and interaction in these areas are thus limited in both frequency and duration. For example, in Burkina Faso, the UN Country Team struggled to identify risks in more marginalized regions until it deliberately decentralized into field offices and sought partnerships with local civil society organizations (Lara and Delsol 2020). Moreover, actors based in remote and rural locations are less likely to be known to IPBO staff and thus less likely to receive invitations to choice opportunities. If they are invited, they may struggle to attend given the difficulties of travel. As mentioned, urban bias is a matter of degree—local knowledges *can* be gathered in rural areas, but are less likely to be.

Second, IPBO local knowledge acquisition is prone to bias toward knowledges held by elites, including local elites and locally based expatriates. Expatriates in peacebuilding contexts typically form tightly knit communities where members know each other (Autesserre 2014). Local elite actors tend to be relatively visible in local political and social settings and therefore easier for IPBO staff (particularly international staff) to identify. Some IPBOs, like UN missions, may in fact be mandated to interact with them. Moreover, elites are more likely to be (Western) educated and thus to speak and write in a language international IPBO staff understand. Their wealth and status typically allow them to access spaces where IPBO staff also congregate both formally (e.g., government events, embassies, academic work-

[14] Once present, invitees must also voice their local knowledges, a dynamic we explore under filtering below.

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shops) and informally (e.g., restaurants, receptions), multiplying potential points of contact between them and IPBO staff. These factors make elite actors easier for IPBO staff to observe, interact with, and invite to IPBO choice opportunities.

Third, IPBOs risk bias toward acquiring superficial or simplified knowledges when relying on observation and interaction. IPBO staff tend to focus their observations on highly visible or audible processes and, as noted, may lack the background knowledge or analytical capabilities to grasp the complexity and significance of what they observe. Moreover, they can more easily absorb information that is presented in relatively simple terms and fail to understand or retain complicated, nuanced, or ambiguous knowledges.

Finally, IPBO local knowledge acquisition is often biased by preconceived ideas, institutional incentives, and path dependency. Professional training and previous peacebuilding experiences tend to shape what IPBO staff see as necessary or appropriate to know. Whether through observation, interaction, or invitation, they seek out the specific types of information they believe they need, rather than being open to contradiction or unexpected complexity. Organizational procedures and incentives also matter: standard operating procedures, reporting systems, donor or member state directives, and material resource constraints all shape what IPBO staff seek to learn (Autesserre 2021, 69; Martín de Almagro 2021; Nagel et al. 2022).

In addition, preconceived ideas, institutional incentives, and path dependency shape which actors IPBOs seek local knowledge from. As noted, interactions and especially invitations to IPBO choice opportunities are typically targeted. Many IPBO staff work hard to cultivate contacts whom they consider as having particularly relevant or reliable information, building and maintaining networks of such individuals over time. The professional benefits of "breaking" a story—that is, acquiring information that captures the attention of superiors, IPBO leadership, and even officials at parent organization headquarters—incentivize such network-building. They can also generate internal competition over contacts and cause IPBO staff to jealously guard their networks.[15]

Moreover, IPBO policies and organizational culture often encourage interaction with and invitation of certain types of local interlocutors while discouraging others. In UN missions, for example, a hierarchical organizational culture often means that high-level government or military contacts are prized above grassroots actors. The UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy restricts peacekeepers' interactions with recognized human rights violators, while institutional pledges relating to local ownership and gender mainstreaming enjoin interaction with or invitations of other local actors, such as women's groups or displaced individuals, even if others may have more relevant local knowledges for a particular choice opportunity.

Finally, there are strong path dependency effects. For both efficiency and greater certainty, IPBO staff will typically be more inclined to rely on pre-existing contacts or those of colleagues than to seek new sources of knowledge (Chopra and Hohe 2004; Jennings 2016). Indeed, past participation in a regular meeting predicts future participation, and organizers may not consider whether actors not previously present might be usefully included. Staff surveys on the integration of local actors in peacebuilding missions highlight that missions are biased in favor of local individuals with whom they regularly interact (Eckhard 2021, 305). Though continuity in participation can help to build relationships of trust (Distler 2016), if newer participants are deliberately or inadvertently omitted, the group of local interlocutors from whom IPBO staff gather knowledges can become exclusive and entrenched, limiting exposure to new, contradictory, or nuanced knowledges. Without clear reminders that local knowledges are complex and contested, international peacebuilders risk over time coming to view the local knowledges they gain from regular interlocutors and invitees as the only ones that matter—or indeed the only ones that exist.

[15]Author's observation within a UN peacekeeping mission.

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Taken together, these biases privilege certain types of local knowledges while potentially depriving IPBO staff entirely of some conflict-specific geographical, ideational, and institutional knowledges. The emphasis on urban over rural and elite over popular or marginalized knowledge holders creates a risk that IPBOs will acquire oversimplified or incomplete ideational knowledges, particularly where conflicts have largely been fought outside of major cities and/or involved cross-border dynamics. IPBO staff are at particular risk of receiving an erroneously cohesive set of conflict-specific knowledges, suggesting a more unified narrative of what is motivating conflict, what is at stake, and who is involved than is actually the case. Institutional knowledges will also often be limited to state structures rather than traditional or indigenous ones and are likely to focus on national or provincial institutions rather than municipal or village ones—even though conflict and violence are often experienced through and take place in the latter. Even where IPBO staff do reach out to non-urban, non-elite, or other harder-to-access local knowledge holders, they must often rely on interpreters; where this happens, nuance and meaning can sometimes be lost in translation, not only reducing the "quality" of such knowledges, but also making international staff more skeptical of them. This, along with the organizational path dependencies just described, exacerbates the tendency toward simple-to-grasp and simple-to-report knowledges mentioned above.

Filtering

The second step in our conceptual framework of local knowledge incorporation consists of filtering, which prevents some of the local knowledges acquired by an IPBO—and therefore available during a choice opportunity—from being voiced or listened to. Filtering thus further narrows which local knowledges shape problem definitions and potential solutions within an IPBO. We identify two main filtering mechanisms: self-censorship and sidelining. While both can take place subconsciously, our interview material and other sources show that they often represent a deliberate choice based upon perceived costs, risks, and benefits as well as personal or professional biases, preferences, and interests. Both national and international local knowledge holders may self-censor, though differences in organizational status and ties beyond the IPBO may affect their motivations for doing so. Meanwhile, our data suggest that organizational hierarchies typically ensure that the power to sideline—like the power to invite during acquisition—rests predominantly with international staff. Both filtering mechanisms thus reinforce the effects of politics, power, and hierarchy within the garbage can model. As during acquisition, moreover, both mechanisms result in biases that, while not deterministic, systematically make certain knowledges more or less likely to shape decisions.

Self-Censorship

Self-censorship occurs when a participant in a choice opportunity has relevant local knowledge but chooses not to voice it. The concept sets aside idiosyncratic reasons for not voicing local knowledge, such as inattention or forgetfulness, and focuses on knowledge-holders deliberately not doing so. We identify four reasons for this: societal costs, security costs, personal interest costs, and professional interest costs.

Societal costs exist when a local knowledge holder risks opprobrium from their familial, social, or professional community for sharing their knowledges within the IPBO. Societal costs increase with the depth and exclusivity of the knowledges shared. Individuals sharing superficial general geographical, cultural, and institutional insights that are "common knowledge" in the host state are relatively unlikely to incur major societal costs. However, providing detailed knowledges, such as insights into cultural practices and institutions, is more sensitive, and divulging information deemed restricted to a specific group (e.g., a religious or ethnic community, political party, professional association, or armed group) can provoke considerable

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hostility. Where shared knowledges are conflict-specific rather than general, societal costs of sharing may be even higher, because they may be seen to materially favor one group above another. Vulnerability to societal costs also increases with an individual's embeddedness in local society. Since national staff and invited local participants in an IPBO choice opportunity typically have closer social ties in the host state than international staff, they are on average more likely to self-censor.[16]

IPBOs can mitigate the societal costs of local knowledge sharing at choice opportunities in two ways. First, they can invest in good community relations: The better the organization's relationship with local communities, the less controversial it is for local knowledge holders to share knowledges with the organization. Second, IPBOs can work to preserve the confidentiality of discussions during choice opportunities: Communities cannot penalize members for sharing local knowledge if they do not know that they have done so. This consideration imposes a potential trade-off with local knowledge acquisition: inviting more outsiders to a choice opportunity increases the available local knowledges, but the larger audience—and therefore greater likelihood that community members will learn what knowledges participants shared—may lead to more self-censoring. Even with careful mitigation, however, IPBOs cannot eliminate societal costs of local knowledge sharing entirely. In a conflict environment, any IPBO is likely to encounter hostility from at least some societal actors—and when hostility is sufficiently high, even unfounded rumors of knowledge sharing can impose societal costs. As one national staff member in the widely unpopular UN mission in CAR put it, "people sometimes think of me as a traitor. They say, 'that guy, he's selling our information. He's not with us anymore.' That happens a lot."[17]

Security costs exist when local knowledge holders risk reprisals for sharing their knowledge within the IPBO. Security costs are most likely to emanate from armed local actors and therefore to attach to conflict-specific knowledges that are about or directly affect these actors. Importantly, this usually includes the host government, which is often keen to avoid UN scrutiny of repressive or illegal activities and may use coercion to silence critics or political opponents (von Billerbeck and Tansey 2019). Like societal costs, security costs are most likely to lead to self-censorship among national staff and other local citizens, who may be more vulnerable to threats from local armed actors and are typically less well protected by IPBO security protocols. The UN acknowledges that "[n]ot only [do] actual sources face risks, but also anyone suspected of being a PKI [peacekeeping intelligence] source," and that this is especially the case for "national staff and their families" (UN DPO/IFS 2020, 158). In Cambodia, national staff involved in knowledge-gathering for UNTAC were reportedly "very, very afraid" when the mission was preparing its withdrawal in 1993 (McNamara 1998, 15). MONUSCO Language Assistants expressed similar fears in 2017 (Coleman 2020a, 186). Security guarantees and efforts to ensure the confidentiality of IPBO discussions can mitigate security costs, but rarely eliminate them.

Personal interest costs exist when sharing local knowledge at an IPBO choice opportunity would negatively affect the knowledge holder's private interests. These interests can be illicit: For example, both international and local individuals engaging in corruption, nepotism, or sexual exploitation and abuse have an incentive not to share local knowledges within the IPBO that could bring scrutiny to them (Jennings 2015). However, conflicts of interest are not restricted to criminal activities. For example, international and national staff receiving compensation for working in dangerous conditions (hazard pay) have an incentive to underreport security improvements in their area of operation in order to avoid payment reductions. Lo-

[16] Invited international staff from other organizations may also face societal costs that lead to self-censoring, notably if friends and colleagues in their own workplace question their loyalty for divulging privileged information (e.g., sources of project funding or the identity of local interlocutors able to facilitate access to particular conflict actors) or if sharing local knowledges that reflects poorly on their organization.

[17] Author's interview, Bangui, June 8, 2019.

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cal citizens and international staff with close friendship or family ties in the host state may avoid contributing local knowledge elements that might induce an IPBO decision that would disadvantage those close to them (Bourgoin et al. 2013). Ironically, here and with societal costs, the same connections that can help an individual acquire local knowledges may constitute an incentive not to share them within the IPBO.

Perceived personal interest costs are most likely to filter out knowledges that are not commonly shared: There is little point in attempting to sequester a knowledge element through self-censorship that many others in the choice opportunity could also contribute. Indeed, self-censoring individuals may contribute copious amounts of relatively common knowledge (e.g., superficial general geographic, cultural, and institutional knowledges) to compensate for their silence on matters affecting their private self-interest. For similar reasons and to shift the IPBO's focus, they may also deliberately contribute biased or misleading conflict-specific knowledges, such as geographical, ideational, or institutional knowledges about groups other than those close to them. Such strategies may be preferable to contributing falsehoods, which, if discovered, could lead to exclusion from future choice opportunities. IPBOs can mitigate such risks by ensuring the regular rotation of staff, a minimum level of fair pay, particularly national staff, and vetting those who are invited to contribute to choice opportunities. However, rotation of national staff can be particularly problematic, given that they are not usually deployed from elsewhere but work in their hometowns, and vetting may further put local knowledge holders on guard, rendering them even less likely to provide reliable information.

Finally, local knowledge holders may self-censor to avoid *professional interest costs*, which fall into three broad though potentially overlapping categories. First, sharing local knowledge during the IPBO choice opportunity can generate *workload costs* for international and national IPBO staff. New conflict-specific geographical knowledges may lead the IPBO to redeploy resources and personnel to new areas, while additional insights into conflict-specific institutions and ideations may prompt the IPBO to amend its programming. Knowledge-holders who foresee that such changes would entail an unwelcome workload increase, distract them from preferred projects, or jeopardize their employment (e.g., by eliminating their core assignment) have incentives to self-censor. Second, shifts in IPBO activities and priorities can generate *work unit costs*: Some sections or units may gain importance and material resources, while others may see their status and budgets reduced. Local knowledge holders who believe that their units will be disadvantaged have an incentive to self-censor. Third, sharing local knowledge at an IPBO choice opportunity can generate *workplace conflict costs*. A local knowledge holder may self-censor if sharing their knowledge undermines the priorities their supervisor has identified, reveals a manager's ignorance, or will be interpreted as "speaking out of turn" by colleagues. The more precarious the knowledge holder perceives their employment or their participation in the IPBO choice opportunity to be, the more likely they are to self-censor (Goetze 2019). By contrast, participants in a choice opportunity may be eager to share knowledges, particularly conflict-specific knowledges, if they think it will enhance their standing within the IPBO. This is not risk-free, however: They may embellish or exaggerate details or share knowledge before it has been confirmed, thus potentially putting personnel, resources, and the organization's reputation in peril. Again, the IPBO may mitigate the risks associated with professional interest costs by ensuring that units are adequately resourced, that managers rotate and their workplans are reviewed by others, and that knowledges are carefully triangulated. Nevertheless, these are all resource- and time-intensive actions and thus not likely to be undertaken systematically.

Overall, self-censorship is likely to systematically bias the local knowledges shared at IPBO choice opportunities toward superficial, commonly known, and already-agreed elements whose sharing generates few societal or personal costs for the

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knowledge holder while creating minimal conflict within the IPBO. This generally reinforces the biases that arise during acquisition toward general knowledges. Novel, detailed insights that can upset the organizational status quo are much more likely to be suppressed by self-censoring, thus potentially causing the IPBO to ignore crucial information and continue with "business as usual" rather than rethink its priorities and programs.

Sidelining

Sidelining occurs when local knowledges gained during the acquisition phase are voiced but not taken into account in problem definition or solution identification during a choice opportunity. Sidelining can be intentional or unintentional. Its likelihood depends on the distance and power differential between the local knowledge holder and the senior decision-maker(s) at the meeting. If the local knowledge holder is close to the senior decision-maker(s) or holds authority over them—or is the decision-maker him/herself—sidelining is unlikely. By contrast, knowledge contributed by individuals with limited personal or professional ties to the decision-maker(s) and no authority over them is more likely to be sidelined. Given that in most IPBOs decision-making authority is concentrated among senior international staff, these individuals typically act as gatekeepers for which local knowledge contributions are taken into account or sidelined. Since greater social and professional barriers typically exist between international staff and host state nationals than among international staff (Autesserre 2014; Shepherd 2015; Goetze 2019), national actors and even national IPBO staff are generally more likely to find their knowledge contributions sidelined. We posit that sidelining occurs through three pathways: bias, mistrust, and institutional incentives.[18]

First, conscious or unconscious *biases* can lead decision-makers to disregard local knowledge contributions offered at a choice opportunity. They may be biased against deep, country-specific local knowledge altogether, favoring comparative expertise from other international missions (Autesserre 2014, 69; Mamiya 2018; Goetze 2019). Indeed, if decision-makers' own expertise is comparative, they may discount country-specific local knowledges because they do not understand their relevance to the decision at hand. Where decision-makers do value local knowledge, they may be biased against certain types of local knowledge-holders, for example, sidelining contributions based on the knowledge holder's gender, race, ethnicity, education level, or whether they are national or international actors. Bias can also reflect an in-group/out-group dynamic, where decision-makers are likely to acknowledge local knowledge presented by those who are similar to them, reason like them, and are socialized into the organizational culture of the IPBO, while sidelining local knowledge contributions from individuals who have different personalities, backgrounds, and ways of working. Thus, senior international staff acting as decision-makers in UN peacekeeping may register local knowledge provided by other international staff through a written memo supported by "objective" data, while sidelining local knowledge expressed by national staff or an invited host state citizen that is based on personal experience and expressed as a feeling or anecdote.[19] Conversely, international staff leading choice opportunities may romanticize local citizens as the only source of local knowledge and envision specific local citizens participating in the meeting as embodying "the local." In these cases, decision-makers will be biased toward incorporating—possibly uncritically—local knowledge contributed by these individuals while sidelining contributions from others not deemed to be "authentic" local knowledge holders (Lidén et al. 2009;

[18]While sidelining can occur for idiosyncratic reasons such as personal dislike, as with self-censorship, we focus on identifying more general mechanisms.

[19]The tendency of international peacekeeping personnel to "mission hop" from one peace operation to another over the course of their careers exacerbates this effect, as they are seen to possess a set of transferrable skills for peacebuilding.

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Richmond 2009; Oksamytna et al. 2023). In short, whether they embrace or are skeptical of local knowledges, IPBO staff are likely to "prune" the knowledges they obtain—that is, "get rid of their undesirable elements, especially those which challenge established beliefs and practices" (Acharya 2018, 45).

The above biases can affect all local knowledge types, but are likely to be more pronounced for local knowledges that are complex, ambiguous, or difficult to explain. By contrast, succinct local knowledge contributions supported by material evidence are relatively hard to sideline. Consequently, general geographical and institutional knowledges that are perceived as relatively static are likely to be retained, while ideational knowledges and conflict-specific knowledges, which are frequently nuanced, contradictory, and rapidly changing, are more likely to be sidelined.

Second, sidelining can be motivated by *mistrust*. By definition, there is an asymmetry of information between local knowledge holders and international decision-makers, where the former have expertise that the latter lack. Decision-makers recognize that local knowledge holders may have incentives to distort their local knowledge contributions—including, as noted above, through self-censorship—in response to societal, security, personal interest, and professional interest costs. Decision-makers also recognize that some local knowledge holders may calibrate their contributions to maximize their inclusion in IPBO choice opportunities, which allows them to gather insider information on the decision-making process, exert influence, and potentially protect other interests. Decision-makers who fear that a knowledge holder may be taking advantage of the prevailing information asymmetry are apt to sideline that person's local knowledge contribution.

Mistrust tends to be particularly salient in international IPBO staff considerations of local knowledge contributions by national actors, sometimes, including national IPBO staff. In general, international staff are wary of depending on local actors, whom they frequently view as (partly) untrustworthy, subjective, lacking in transferable or theoretical expertise, less experienced, and without a comparative perspective across conflict settings (Autesserre 2014; Goetze and Bliesemann de Guevara 2014). Local knowledge contributions from national actors who are new to the IPBO are especially likely to be sidelined, since there is usually greater trust between actors who have known or worked together previously, including long-time employees of the same IPBO and staff who circulate to the same duty stations. Indeed, as during acquisition, IPBO staff tend to cultivate networks of interlocutors whose trustworthiness they have ascertained over time. To the extent that these individuals provide an alternative source of local knowledge—and particularly local knowledge likely to align with the IPBO's collective views and experience—decision-makers will more confidently sideline contributions from newer or more distant knowledge holders.

As with biases, mistrust can affect all local knowledge types contributed to choice opportunities. However, it tends to produce the strongest sidelining effects for knowledges that international IPBO staff cannot readily verify through triangulation, multiple sources, or replication (i.e., re-acquire themselves) or that do not come from "trusted interlocutors." Again, this tends to privilege general, simplified geographical or institutional knowledges above both general ideational and all types of conflict-specific knowledges. The latter tend to be subject to more disagreement and contestation—and their complexity makes them more difficult to "use" in decision-making (as we discuss below)—making IPBO staff even more likely to view them as biased or unreliable and therefore to sideline them. It also reinforces the path dependency that affects acquisition that we discussed previously (Barma 2017).

Finally, sidelining can occur due to *institutional incentives* within the IPBO, echoing the professional interest considerations for self-censorship. Since most IPBOs are project organizations, decision-makers typically must report to their headquarters and comply with institutional rules, regulations, and norms, which can induce

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them to prioritize certain local knowledge contributions and sideline others. Pressures from headquarters and socialization into the organization's culture can include the need to deliver concrete outputs or meet targets, the need to show that decisions and solutions to various challenges are found quickly and effectively, and the need to convince headquarters of successes in the field as well as the importance of a continued presence so as not to imperil their own jobs (Autesserre 2010; Mansfield 2015; Julian 2016; Mac Ginty 2017). Staff also need to demonstrate compliance with rules, regulations, and legal restrictions imposed by either the organization or the host country. In addition, they may also have personal and professional ambitions, such as the desire to be promoted or to move to a different duty station, and thus will shape their behavior to maximize the achievements of such goals.

Such considerations may lead IPBO decision-makers to value information that confirms previous understandings and "existing frames," current courses of action, or organizational objectives; that aligns with set rules and procedures; or that demonstrates their personal skill for getting access to individuals with "good" or insider information (Zimmermann 2017). Consequently, they are more likely to sideline local knowledge contributions that suggest a departure from established organizational priorities, practices, and procedures; that diverge significantly from prior understandings or challenge pre-existing or theoretical ideas about the nature of the conflict and the most appropriate ways to build peace; that entail significant financial or material costs; that challenge senior management at headquarters; or that risk a staff member's standing within the organization. Indeed, detailed local knowledges—what Parícek (2017, 564) calls "thick local expertise"—are likely to lay bare the complexity and nuance of a conflict setting, potentially calling into question the appropriateness of peacebuilding strategies based upon simplified notions or embedded organizational processes. Taking these local knowledges into account can detract staff members' ability to demonstrate results efficiently, quickly, and cost-effectively (Paris and Sisk 2009; Smits and Cruz 2011; Autesserre 2014). Most IPBO decision-makers may therefore welcome complex local knowledges only up to the point they deem necessary to meet objectives and targets, leading them to favor general over conflict-specific knowledges, with the exception of IPBO ecosystem knowledges that may help them in their operational planning.[20] Importantly, these dynamics align with and may reinforce sidelining based on bias and especially mistrust.

In addition, IPBO staff may sideline local knowledges that organizational regulations and expectations prevent them from using. For example, as noted above, institutional knowledges include information about tacit rules and procedures and unofficial powerholders that are key to political bargains among elites in the country and thus an important if unspoken part of the political system (Castillejo 2016; Mamiya 2018). While these knowledges may be highly relevant to peacebuilding decisions, IPBO staff may be required to work with formal state actors and institutions and therefore barred from using such knowledge of informal political and conflict institutions.

Institutional imperatives have more balanced implications for national and international actors than bias and mistrust. National actors may still be most likely to find their contributions sidelined, because as relative outsiders to the IPBO, they are most likely to provide local knowledge elements that challenge IPBO assumptions and processes. However, international staff working in locations removed from organizational headquarters may also provide complex or discordant information, which is often sidelined during choice opportunities. For example, political or human rights officers in the field office of a UN peace operation may gather detailed

[20]Similarly, van Leeuwen (2009, 7) contends that peacebuilders "need to simplify reality to be able to operate and deal with the complexity of conflict and peacebuilding." Likewise, von Billerbeck (2020, 491) notes that peacebuilders use discourse to "simplify away challenges, complexity, and dilemmas."

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and highly complex information about a conflict setting. As noted above, this knowledge may be lost at the acquisition stage if it is not transmitted (or not transmitted fully) to participants in the relevant choice opportunity. If the local knowledges are acquired, however, and therefore available at the choice opportunity, they may still be sidelined as impractical or otherwise inconsistent with decision-makers' institutional incentives.

Conclusion and a New Research Agenda

There is broad consensus among international peacebuilding actors that local knowledge is vital for effective interventions. However, there is little systematic attention to *which* local knowledges are required, how international actors can acquire them, and under what conditions those that are available at decision-making moments actually shape decisions. This article has addressed these gaps by presenting a typology of the local knowledges relevant to peacebuilding and by building on the garbage can theory of organizational decision-making to propose a two-step theoretical framework of local knowledges incorporation. Our model distinguishes local knowledges acquisition, which affects which knowledges are available during an IPBO choice opportunity, and filtering, which determines which of the acquired local knowledges shape the decision taken. We have argued that both stages of local knowledges incorporation are vulnerable to systematic biases and tend to favor certain types of local knowledges above others. We find in particular that simplified or general geographic, ideational, and institutional knowledges and those that confirm previously held beliefs or support existing operational plans shape decision-making more than complex, changeable, or nuanced conflict-specific knowledges. We also find that international peacebuilders remain key gatekeepers of local knowledge acquisition and have the ability to silence or remove certain voices during filtering. In this way, in IPBOs, decision-making processes and the matching of problems and solutions are neither fully rational nor fully random, and they are heavily framed by power imbalances and political relations between knowledge holders and decision-makers.

Indeed, taken together, the mechanisms of knowledge acquisition and the processes of knowledge filtering, including both self-censorship and sidelining, highlight the political nature of local knowledge integration, thus going beyond existing organizational decision-making theories: The matching of problems and solutions is based not only on how well they "fit," but rather on relations among decision participants and who has the power to reject or ignore knowledges or successfully advocate for others. In large IPBOs, like the UN, this power lies squarely with international staff rather than national staff or external interlocutors.

Based upon these findings, we propose a new research agenda that furthers the empirical and theoretical investigation of both local knowledges and their incorporation by international actors. Empirically, while we have illustrated our argument with reference to UN peacekeeping missions, our theoretical framework is likely to also apply to other IPBOs (including international NGOs and state aid agencies) or to international actors engaged in other types of operational activities requiring local knowledges, such as development aid, disaster relief, or refugee assistance. Future research could usefully investigate our framework in these different types of organizations and activities.

In addition, we identify five areas for further theoretical investigation. First, our typology of local knowledges could be adapted to other types of international activities. For example, local knowledges relating to refugee flows may require a set of legal knowledges relating to locally applicable refugee conventions and national asylum laws. Subsequently, comparisons between activities could illuminate which types of local knowledges are relevant to (almost) all international actors and which are specific to particular interventions. Moreover, we would expect that these ty-

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pologies are not static but evolve over time, reflecting international actors' changing understandings of their activities and roles. Consequently, inclusion of some types of local knowledge (e.g., about local gender relations) across typologies may reflect global norms and provide insight into how such norms have evolved over time.

Second, what specific kinds of organizational structures facilitate or impede effective local knowledge incorporation? Our model allows not only for more systematic assessment of the local knowledge incorporation process within a single organization but also comparison across organizations. Holding recognition of the importance of incorporating local knowledge constant, what characteristics (if any) make some organizations better suited than others to local knowledge acquisition, appropriate filtering, or both?

Relaxing our simplifying assumption of a single, two-stage local knowledge incorporation process suggests one dimension of difference. Organizations with long communication chains effectively interpose multiple rounds of acquisition and filtering between the original acquisition and the ultimate decision. At each intermediary choice opportunity, local knowledge acquired up to that stage is filtered, generating a new subset of acquired local knowledges for the next choice opportunity. As described above, detailed, complex information about a conflict setting is usually distilled as it moves up the reporting hierarchy. In the UN, this hierarchy is relatively long, stretching from mission field offices to mission headquarters and possibly to New York, meaning there are more opportunities for information to be lost along the way. By contrast, in organizations with shorter reporting lines, the local knowledges available at choice opportunities, we hypothesize, will tend to be more copious and less refined.

Another difference among organizations is the clarity with which choice opportunities are identified, which allows communication chains to be more deliberately directed toward them. The less clarity there is on where and when decisions will be made, the more haphazard the set of local knowledges actually available at the choice opportunity, adding an additional randomness dimension to the garbage can model. Thus, while UN peace operations have developed increasingly sophisticated information-gathering systems, including for local knowledges, uncertainty about where—and to which decision-makers—to direct this information results in local knowledges not always being channeled to relevant choice opportunities, leaving the acquisition process incomplete.[21]

Third, what levels of filtering and what kinds of biases (if any) are appropriate during IPBO local knowledge incorporation? Decision-makers cannot be attentive to all information across all local knowledge types potentially relevant to a decision and thus some filtering is both necessary and acceptable. The more streamlined local knowledges arriving at the final choice opportunity of the UN's long communication chain may be better suited to the proposal of a clear set of actions than a wealth of more complex, detailed knowledges. Moreover, the risk of some local knowledge holders exploiting information asymmetries is real and may warrant IPBO decision-makers privileging local knowledge elements that they themselves hold or can verify. Beyond deliberate deception, uncertainty and misinformation are rife in many conflict zones, justifying some reliance on trusted sources during acquisition and filtering, albeit at the risk of sidelining other local knowledges and incorporating mistaken local knowledge claims. Jervis's (1976, 119) distinction between rational and irrational inferences—defining the latter as those that "would be rejected by the person if he were aware of employing them"—has relevance to local knowledge acquisition and filtering mechanisms. As we discuss above, however, the actors involved are not neutral knowledge seekers, and thus may be motivated by

[21]We thank our workshop participants for stressing both of these complexities.

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personal or professional interests to accept a mechanism even if they recognize it as leading to sub-optimal local knowledge incorporation.

Fourth, what is the role of local actors in the process of knowledge incorporation? We have focused on acquisition, filtering, and systematic bias from the perspective of IPBOs, and thus we do not examine in detail the role of local agencies or the strategies local actors might use to gain invitations to decision opportunities or to overcome or exploit the biases of international actors. Moreover, local actors may have biases of their own, including along the same lines as those we identify (e.g., toward urban knowledge) that in fact reproduce some of the power dynamics we identify. More research into the role of local actors, including political and military elites, traditional authorities, and civil society, as gatekeepers of local knowledges could help to understand incorporation more fully, as well as identify solutions to some of the issues we identify.

Fifth, our model raises but does not yet answer the question of whether improved local knowledge incorporation increases IPBO effectiveness, a question that is important both for scholarship and for practitioners, who may be unaware of persistent blind spots in their local knowledge incorporation and the effects this may have on their ability to support peace. We hope not only to have inspired an empirical investigation of this question but also to have offered a framework for defining what in fact constitutes "better" or "worse" local knowledge incorporation that can inform and improve the systems and processes that IPBOs and others use in their activities.

Finally, our findings suggest that IPBOs themselves have much work to do to better recognize their own blind spots and take more active steps to incorporate knowledges from a wider range of local knowledge holders. This could entail a range of self-assessment tools, establishing mechanisms to understand the different approaches to local knowledges among their own staff, and analysis of the benefits and risks of established networks of interlocutors. As noted, we expect that a variety of project organizations that undertake intervention across a wide range of functional areas—not just peacebuilding organizations—will experience similar patterns in local knowledge incorporation in their activities. We hope that our framework and the risks of systematic biases that we have identified can thus support not only academic research, but the internal processes of these actors.

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