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Beyond the local turn: Local orderings and ordering of international organizations

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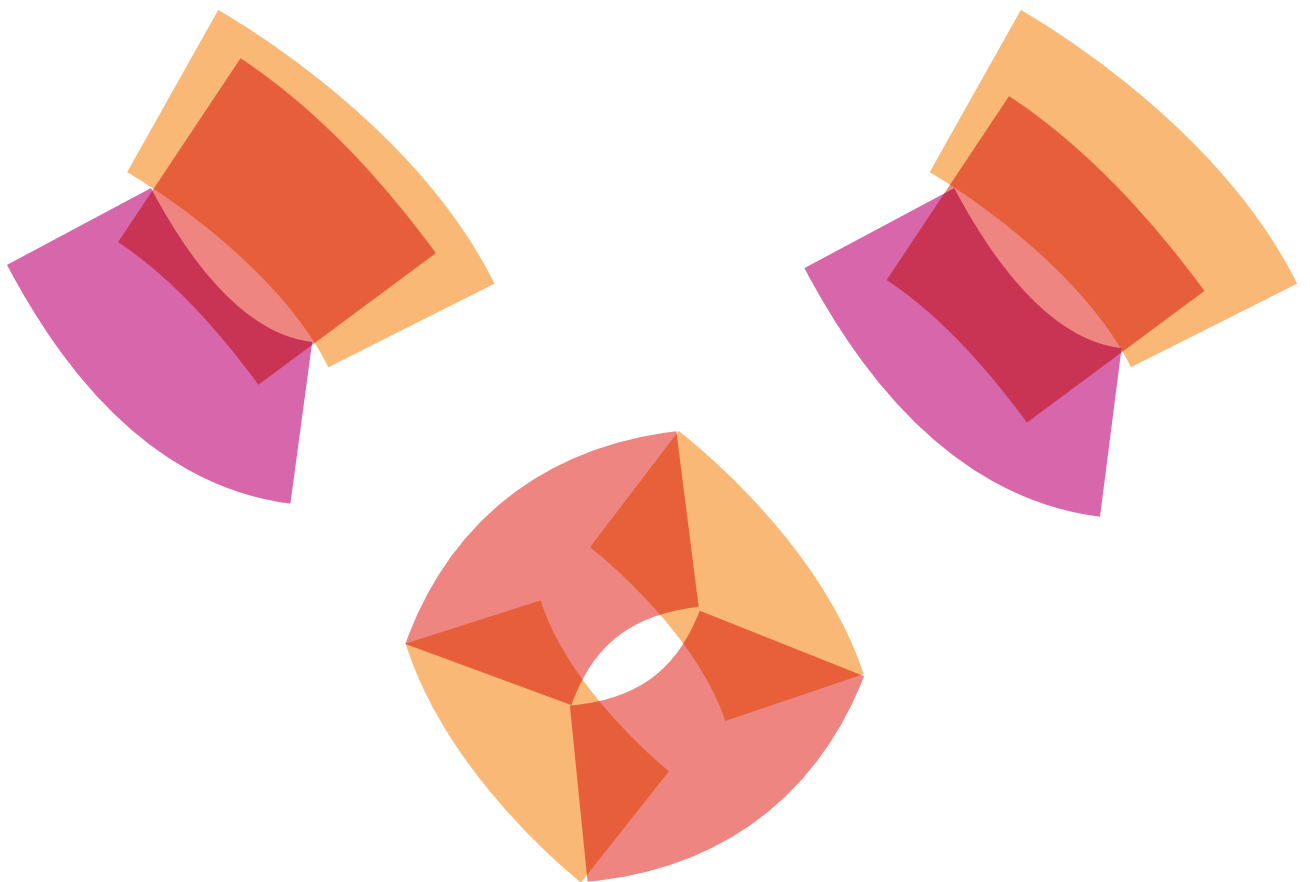


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Global Cooperation Research Papers 32

Karolina Kluczevska and Anna Kreikemeyer

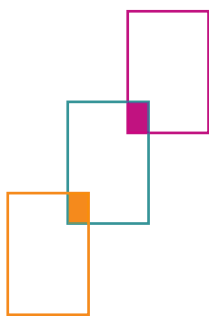
Beyond the Local Turn: Local Orderings and Ordering of International Organizations



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Karolina Kluczevska and Anna Kreikemeyer

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Preface

Discussions on the promises and pitfalls of Western interventions in peacebuilding and development policies are not new and have in fact been debated globally for quite some time. The Centre for Global Cooperation Research is actively involved in these discussions, particularly on the themes of 'the local turn', resilience, and relationality. Karolina Kluczevska and Anna Kreikemeyer follow this line of research on the post-liberal debate in peacebuilding and development, but rightfully argue that the debate needs to go 'beyond the local turn'. Through their practice-oriented perspective, both scholars bring fresh conceptual and methodological ideas to the table, giving emphasis to the notion of 'ordering' as a key to understanding difficulties in international-local interactions on the ground. This promising direction avoids the usual dichotomies of agency and structure and instead foregrounds the multiple and diverse forms of ordering in relation to other specific elements, such as cultural beliefs and norms, everyday practices, institutions, and issues of power. Furthermore, in conjunction with their intense fieldwork in post-Soviet Central Asia, the authors apply ethnographic research methods and demonstrate the added value of their conceptual approach on ordering processes. Their focus on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan provides insights from countries that remain underexplored in the peacebuilding discourse. Karolina Kluczevska and Anna Kreikemeyer's interesting and original empirical findings elucidate the differences between the informal everyday practices and largely formalized practices that structure the work of International Organizations. The analysis of institutional contexts reveals various patterns of legitimacy; for example, local institutions often depend on factors such as age and gender, while ordering practices of International Organizations rely on standardized, one-size-fits-all operational criteria. The results align with the sceptical assessments given by many critical scholars around the post-liberal debate. Finally, the performative notion of ordering and the empirical focus on conflictual ordering processes in different cases address key topics of the current research agenda on world ordering and practices of (de-)legitimation.

Frank Gadinger (Editorial Board)

Beyond the Local Turn: Local Orderings and Ordering of International Organizations

Karolina Kluczevska and Anna Kreikemeyer

1 Introduction

For many reasons, international interventions are needed in conflict-affected areas and the so-called development settings. To mention the most apparent one, a third party with international legitimacy can literally put a halt to violent conflicts and separate the contending parties. It can also help negotiate a ceasefire and later a peace agreement between them. Moreover, when supply chains are interrupted as a result of a conflict, international organizations (IOs) can help provide basic goods and services to affected populations and evacuate civilians. And yet, despite these obvious benefits, it became common knowledge that long-term international peacebuilding and development aid often encountered both unintended outcomes and counterproductive effects – with the most ‘prominent’ examples being Kosovo, Mali, and, most recently, Afghanistan.

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For several years, practitioners and scholars engaging in peacebuilding and development interventions have been pointing to weaknesses of international-local interactions in aid settings. As part of a broader *local turn*, several scholars adopted a problem-solving approach and suggested specific instruments to better engage with the local (see Debiel, Held, and Schneckener 2016; de Coning 2018; Ejodus 2021; Paffenholz 2021). Simultaneously, from a critical peace studies perspective, the local has often been criticized as an imaginary constructed by interveners driven by their own interests (Richmond 2006; Suhrke 2007; Heathershaw 2009b; Autesserre 2010; Mac Ginty 2016; Owen et al. 2018; Goetze 2019). In turn, post-colonial contributions have continuously denounced the imperial bases of Western knowledge production about local contexts in which IOs operate, and pointed to local resistance and subversion (Peterson 2012; Jabri 2013; Sabaratnam 2017).

As we explain in the next section, this discussion currently appears to be stuck between, on the one hand, an ongoing attempt to improve international-local interaction in theory and practice, and, on the other, an ever more sophisticated critique of international interventions as part of current global governance. In the meantime, most IOs continue to seek solutions that instrumentally engage local stakeholders in their projects by promoting the principle of local ownership. However, improving the design of projects through consulta-

tions with local actors – which often do not translate into practice – appears cosmetic, and rather secondary, vis-à-vis the first, fundamental step which would require IOs to better explore and understand the local, while at the same time rethink their own underlying normative assumptions and abandon their basic organizational frameworks and orthodox planning. IOs would need to try ‘placing [themselves] “in the shoes” of others’ (Chandler 2018: 86) and reflect on how peace is constructed in other ways than envisaged by liberal peacebuilding and development (Brzoska et al. 2019). They would have to acknowledge that actors on the ground not only engage in conflicts, but are also capable of settling conflicts and preventing violence on their own. Because such a basic change of approach is not happening – beyond the rhetorical level – it can be argued that local capacities for peace continue to be underestimated, and even side-lined, by IOs. Yet, local conflict settlement and local peace formation often prove crucial to building peace on the ground (Richmond 2016; Autesserre 2017, 2021). One of the best human capacities, the capacity to make peace following specific societies’ judgements and rules, should not be underestimated. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility of international support for these efforts.

Our starting point is that there are very basic, underlying structural problems with international-local interactions within peacebuilding and development interventions. These problems concern normative and organizational frictions between the *modi operandi* of international and local actors. In this paper, we attempt to shed new light on where these problems come from. Some further explanation is needed to explicate where we position ourselves in this ongoing discussion. As part of the post-liberal debate¹, Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond have already advocated for a paradigm change by conceptualizing indicators of peaceful agency at the micro-level. Taking ‘peace as the principal referent’ (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2014: 15), they developed a critical agenda focusing on the local range of everyday peace as a ‘localised *modus vivendi* [based on] tolerance and coexistence’ (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013: 769f). As part of this ongoing debate, other researchers explored bottom-up processes of coping, resilience, or emerging orders (e.g. Menkhaus 2013; Chandler 2015; Randazzo 2017). However, in our view, many of these contributions too quickly oriented themselves towards proposing specific steps to improve the practices of international-local interactions. In other words, they tried to better understand the local in order to identify more effective entry points for international actors – to offer concrete fixes to make IOs better account for local specificities in their interventions.

It is a small group of interdisciplinarity-oriented social anthropologists, area studies experts, and critical peace researchers who attempted to re-shift the focus and explore peaceful local ordering(s) that develop on their own, without

¹ The debate has taken place mostly in journals such as *Peacebuilding*, *Peacekeeping*, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, and *Third World Quarterly*.

automatically trying to identify entry points for international interventions. Following this interdisciplinary approach and applying a related methodological toolkit, we rely on the concept of ordering. This allows us to refocus attention from international to local actors without losing sight of IOs. Thus, ordering refers to processes of meaning-making: it involves practices that provide orientation to individuals, allow them to understand the behaviour of others, and, ultimately, form a community characterized by shared norms and values. Here, we draw on insights of Katja Mielke with colleagues who looked at social orders as ‘structuring and structured processes of social interaction, generated by the interplay of cognitive worldviews and institutions’ (Mielke, Schetter, and Wilde 2011: 5).

In our conceptualization of local orderings, we first follow Birgit Bräuchler’s understanding of the local – grounded in Appadurai’s (1998) and Escobar’s (2001) writing, ‘as a concrete context of practical appropriation, interpretation and transformation of sociocultural discourses, ideas and practices that have their roots both in global, regional and local interests, traditions and actors’ (2017: 20). This understanding integrates culture, tradition, and spatiality, and emphasizes the contested, ambivalent and fluid character of local concepts and agency (Bräuchler 2018). In turn, we unpack the complexities of ordering by following a framework provided by Gearoid Millar’s Ethnographic Peace Research (EPR) (Millar 2018a²). This agenda emphasizes the basic relevance of cultural beliefs and norms, everyday practices and institutions without neglecting issues of power (see below). As the third step, we explore both the multiplicity of local orderings on the ground and the *modus operandi* of IOs and compare their key features by analysing and juxtaposing them.

Findings from ethnographic fieldwork in various world regions suggest that local ordering is relevant for conflict settlement and peace formation. Our exploration of local ordering does not aim to feed into romanticization or essentialization of local lifestyles or reinforce simple binaries, such as the clash of civilizations paradigm. We recognize that local orderings are complex (Bargués-Pedreny 2017: 227) and very diverse – this is why we opt for the plural form of ‘orderings’ rather than singular ‘ordering.’ They can be both peaceful and non-peaceful, depending on the situation. They can refer to different localities or multiple social configurations in trans-local spaces. Moreover, while we acknowledge the internal diversity of local ordering – such as rural versus urban lifestyles – we need to resort to some generalization to keep our discussion concise. Consequently, our conceptualization of local orderings is built upon ideal types. We recognize, however, that there are always differences in real life.

² Developed as part of his ‘disaggregated theory of hybridity’ (Millar 2014), which allows to integrate the analysis of different local and international settings and interactions, see below.

Similarly, while there is a diversity within and between IOs, in our analysis of peacebuilding and development interventions we specifically refer to Western-led, Western-dominated, or Western-funded international and international nongovernmental organizations. Undoubtedly, some IOs, such as United Nations (UN) agencies, include non-Western members. However, peacebuilding and development projects are funded mainly by Western states and most often implemented in non-Western, so-called ‘developing’ countries. Because the modality of delivering funding and donor-recipient relations in such organizations follow a similar logic, when describing IOs we refer to singular ‘ordering’ rather than ‘orderings.’

The post-liberal debate, in our view, has become deadlocked and repetitive because it continually and prematurely attempts to bring together local and international actors working together for peace and development. While this is a noble and practical aim, it appears premature given that it encounters several normative and structural obstacles when attempting to turn it into practice. Local orderings and ordering of IOs are both complex and can hardly be reconciled because of a paradox: ordering mechanisms that appear to be the most relevant on the ground are often neither recognized nor understood in IO-led peacebuilding and development interventions, and vice versa. Importantly, we point to normative diversity rather than normative difference in order to avoid essentializations and also moral judgement as to which ordering is the ‘right’ one (see Bargués-Pedreny and Mathieu 2018). As we elaborate throughout the paper, fundamental variations can often be found between cultural beliefs on the ground, especially in communitarian contexts where they are frequently paternalistic and gendered, and international norms, which in Western-funded IOs are predominantly liberal. Moreover, there are differences between informal everyday practices performed by local actors and largely formalized practices structuring IOs’ work. As for institutions guiding different forms of ordering, they follow different patterns of legitimacy. Local institutions often depend on factors such as age and gender, while ordering of IOs overwhelmingly relies on standardized, one-size-fits-all operational criteria. There are also significant power imbalances characterizing the relations between local actors and IOs in aid contexts, which result from funding and geopolitical considerations. Overall, this diversity hinders mutual understanding and collaborative peace formation. At the first glance, this seems to be a fatalistic conclusion, but we believe that it offers an important starting point for local and international actors to develop innovative approaches to complex international-local relations.

While our discussion on ordering mechanisms is mainly aimed to be conceptual, we provide empirical examples from post-Soviet Central Asia to illustrate our argument. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and emergence of five independent states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), this region has experienced several conflicts that escalated

into violence.³ However, over the last three decades most conflicts in the region concerned everyday, small-scale, resource-related, and interethnic tensions and misunderstandings within and across communities. In this regard, Central Asia offers an interesting case of local ordering, which survived the Soviet times and re-emerged after 1991, proving relevant both for how conflicts emanate and how they are managed. Furthermore, in Central Asia local orderings and ordering of IOs are deeply intertwined. Following the Soviet collapse, Central Asia experienced an arrival of international donors⁴ who attempted to promote democracy and a free market economy and to integrate this region into the liberal world order. Thus, over the last three decades a broad range of IOs have implemented hundreds of projects which simultaneously aimed at fostering liberal forms and standards of peacebuilding and development in this region.

2 The postliberal debate and area studies on local ordering

The postliberal debate has actively discussed the weaknesses and negative consequences of international interventions. As mentioned above, this debate has been largely action-oriented, in that it has aimed at proposing ways to improve interactions between international and local actors within peacebuilding and development interventions (e.g. by bringing about better policy outcomes by IOs). International Relations (IR) scholars, in particular, adopted problem-solving approaches focusing on strengthening local ownership (Donais 2008; Narten 2008). This concept, which became prominent in the aid industry in the late 1990s, has envisaged that IOs should consult local actors more actively while designing and implementing their interventions in order to improve their effectiveness on the ground. Local ownership has been criticized on multiple grounds: for being a discursive tool (or lip service) that is not reflected in practice (Fisher and Marquette 2016: 118), as failing to embrace the diversity of local views and practices (Bargués-Pedreny 2016), and as ambiguous with regard to IOs' and local actors' share of ownership over project designs (Narten 2009: 255) or its endpoint, i.e. when there is 'enough' local ownership (Bargués-Pedreny 2020: 268). Many critical peace scholars saw this problem-solving attitude as problematic. For Oliver Richmond, IOs' activities appeared 'virtual' (Richmond 2006: 291), that is largely performative and leading to a distortion of local agency. According to John Heather-

³ The Tajik civil war 1992–1997, an uprising in Andijan in Uzbekistan in 2005, two Kyrgyz revolutions in 2005 and 2010, ethnic unrests in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, power struggles and mass protests in Kyrgyzstan in 2020 and in Kazakhstan in 2022.

⁴ Such as UN Agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, European Union etc.

shaw, IOs' interventions all too often have been driven by 'self-referential motivations [leading] to the defeat of content [and] the triumph of form and end up in chimerical global governance' (Heathershaw 2009b: 156, 155, 150). In a similar vein, Astri Suhrke criticized local ownership as 'their [interveners'] ownership of our [local] ideas' (Suhrke 2007 in Böge et al. 2008: 15).

Besides this criticism of international interventions and pointing to weaknesses of the concept of local ownership, critical peace scholars offered an alternative, which, as an end goal, aimed to improve international peacebuilding: they developed new and partly overlapping conceptualizations of the local. Thus, Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond paid attention to 'actors critical to power [working for peace] under the radar of politics' (Mac Ginty 2015: 852, 850, 848). By emphasizing that 'the real local is mixed' (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013: 770) and 'everyday peace is a local-liberal hybrid', the scholars encouraged interventions that would be more inclusive and sensitive to plural forms of agency (Richmond 2011: 18; see also Mac Ginty 2010). Richmond suggested, a positive hybrid peace:

carrying with it both local and international legitimacy [...] would be rooted in accommodation, reconciliation, emancipation, autonomy, social justice, and a sense of liberation. Institutions grounded in those concepts and adapted to the local context would underpin the provision of rights and needs (Richmond 2015: 60).

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The idea of hybrid peace has been criticized on several grounds, such as for its inability to account for the local's complexity due to the diversity of local spaces and agents (see Bargués-Pedreny 2017). Nevertheless, and importantly for our discussion, the concept of hybridity shows that this debate on the relevance of the local continued in an interaction-oriented way. In this regard, the concept of hybrid political orders (Böge et al. 2008; Belloni 2012; Böge, Debiel, and Rinck 2017) explored synergies in local-international interactions⁵, and the concept of friction emphasized the conflictive nature of corresponding encounters in view of the spatial turn (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013; Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016).

The rising scope of the debate on international interventions has significantly re-shifted the discussion towards local agency and the capacity of local actors to build peace. Séverine Autesserre claimed that 'local people may achieve peace on their own' (2017: 123–125, 114–116). David Chandler (2010) emphasized the right to self-government and national autonomy, while other scholars and practitioners joined the view that the local is not deficient; local capacities to prevent violence exist in every society, and locally established methods of conflict resolution and local peace formation are unavoidable in

⁵ On the 'dark side of hybridity', see Wallis, Jeffery and Kent (2016). For a literature review on hybridity, see Kreikemeyer (2018).

building peace (Anderson and Wallace 2013; Paffenholz 2016; Peace Direct 2019). Empirical studies on local infrastructures for peace (Kumar and de la Haye 2011), everyday peace indicators (Mac Ginty 2016), and zones of peace (Hancock 2017; Hancock and Mitchell 2018) followed suit.

These contributions have undoubtedly provoked a change in perspective by reevaluating the role of local actors. However, this debate has not moved forward to actually integrate, theoretically and in practice, forms of ordering that characterize local contexts, on the one hand, and international organizations, on the other. Meanwhile, in the ‘real world’, IOs continued to focus on local ownership, searching for ways to increase it. In this way, IOs continue taking the second (and secondary) step, namely designing projects which envisage participation of the local within frameworks dictated by IOs (Ejdus 2021), prior to taking the first (and fundamental) step, that is trying to better grasp how the local works.

At the conceptual level, only a few critical peace scholars opened up to growing practical, cultural, and ethnographic turns in political science, paying more attention to everyday microlevel orderings and practices (Richmond and Mitchell 2011; Bliesemann de Guevara and Redhead 2019). Such a bottom-up type of analysis is still seen as a domain of ‘classical’ anthropology, where it is used to explore local cultures and single cases in long-term perspectives. Indeed, social anthropological research has significantly contributed to a conceptualization of local ordering by analysing multiple uniting and dividing lines which structure social interactions at a local level, be it in concrete communities or in trans-local networks (e.g. Mannitz 2017; Bräuchler 2018). And while inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation is still in its infancy, important efforts to increase dialogue have been already undertaken by members of the Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik’s network *Local Ordering and Peace* – founded in 2020, and the Deutsche Vereinigung Politische Wissenschaft’s *Group Political Ethnography* – founded in 2019 (see also Schatz 2009; Wedeen 2010; Aronoff and Kubik 2013; Schlichte 2015).

Among the first peace studies researchers who engaged with the local from a peace research perspective, Gearoid Millar proposed conceptual and methodological tools of EPR (Millar 2018a) that allow the complexities of the local to be unpacked and operationalized. Based on his ethnographic evaluation of peacebuilding operations in Sierra Leone (Millar 2015), Millar not only explained why interference ‘from the outside’ has limited outcomes, but in doing so he also established ‘a new approach to peace research which can forward the local turn’ (Millar 2018a: 1; Millar 2017). In his ‘disaggregated theory of hybridity’ (Millar 2014), the scholar related ideational and structural factors of ordering by attributing key relevance to cultural beliefs, everyday practices, institutions, and issues of power, as a basis for local experiences:

- *Concepts* (beliefs, worldviews, ideas) and corresponding rituals (symbols, ceremonies), have a prescriptive character and cannot be changed easily from the outside (even though they can adapt to social change), as they are perceived as the ‘self-evident and natural order [that has] been internalized, naturalized and taken as a given’ (Millar 2014: 505).
- *Everyday practices* can be seen as fluid micro-moves. Such practices, like buying food or taking care of, are mundane, emergent, and ‘pre-political [...] tactics [that] individuals deploy to get along within complex socio-cultural milieus’ (Millar 2020: 2; see also de Certeau 1984; Sacks 1984). Practices of passive adaptations (silencing, coping) may be invisible and are difficult to access and approach analytically (Värynen 2019).
- *Institutions* reduce complexity, provide orientation, and organize resource distribution (Millar 2014: 505). They integrate structure and agency in (in)formal ways (Helmke and Levitzky 2004). In Central Asian context, for example, the *mahalla* is a visible administrative neighbourhood unit, whereas councils of elders, women leaders, and networks of trust are informal institutions.
- *Issues of power* play a crucial role as local concepts, everyday practices, and institutions not only reflect cultural meaning but also ‘involve a constant awareness of the operation of power’ (Millar 2018b: 606). Following Boedeker et al. (2014), we understand power as a relational ordering force that is embedded in mental models, habitus, and institutions. In many non-Western regions, state authorities provide just one order among many, including custom and religion. Informal loyalty networks are also often intertwined with bureaucratic structures (Steenberg 2016).

Millar not only attempted to build a bridge between peace research and social anthropology, but also advanced the *local turn* by starting his analysis from the ground up, without losing sight of international structures and actors – rather than the other way around, as it is usually the case in development research and practice. Building on the interdisciplinary approach of EPR, in the remaining part of this paper we apply the four conceptual features identified by Millar to analyse local ordering and ordering of IOs.

In addition to Millar’s framework, we emphasize the relevance of social change of ordering. In the era of global mobility, many local actors are situated in multiple socio-spatial configurations (e.g. social media, migration networks) and have experienced the powerful effects of translocality. As a result, their agency is no longer confined to territory and is shaped through navigations between customary and new rules, as well as requirements that actors are exposed to (Dewey, Miguez, and Sain 2017).

There is a lot that the field of peace and development studies can learn from area studies, which ethnographically explore issues of societal conflict and peace. The case of Central Asia is particularly interesting in this regard, and it has been nearly completely overlooked by critical peace scholars – contrary to Africa, Latin America, and South Asia (for few exceptions see Heather-shaw 2009a; Lewis 2016; Lottholz 2018b; Owen et al. 2018; Kreikemeyer 2020). This lack of attention to peaceful societal ordering in Central Asia has several reasons. One of them is the influence of political science literature, which overwhelmingly approached conflicts in the Central Asian region from a state- and security-oriented perspective. This field of research frequently focused on security threats, risks, and protracted conflicts, as well as power games and influence of various external actors, such as Russia, China, and the United States. Consequently, the discourses of danger (Heathershaw and Megoran 2011), which emerged among scholars and practitioners, translated into popular imaginaries of Islamist radicalization, corruption, drug trade, and border issues (De Danieli 2011; Lemon 2016, 2018; Orozobekova 2016). Another reason why critical peace studies overlooked Central Asia concerns the fact that, apart from several smaller-scale interventions aimed at conflict resolution, there has been only one large Western-led peace intervention in this region – during the Tajik civil war 1992–1997.⁶

There is also a certain disappointment with the renaissance of traditionalism, at the societal level, and authoritarianism, at the political level, that has taken place in Central Asia after the Soviet collapse. As a result, Mac Ginty limited his analysis to peace and conflict in Eurasia to the view that ‘China, Russia, India, Iran [...] have different views of how peace and order are best achieved’ (Mac Ginty 2016: 197). However, a few alternative voices emerged as well. For example, referring to Central Asia, Neil Melvin with colleagues called for ‘increase[d] research and analysis of the local contexts in which [...] societal, socioeconomic, and ethno-political [...] conflicts transpire’ (Melvin, Yeongju, and Larsson 2016), and area studies scholar Alisher Khamidov emphasized that ‘[r]esearch which uncovers internal mechanisms for preventing violence is [...] of crucial value to correcting [...] discourse[s] of danger’ (2018: 244).

Unlike the field of peace studies, there is a rich body of area studies research on conflict settlement and various aspects of local ordering in Central Asia. From a disciplinary point of view, this research is largely (political) ethnographic and anthropological. While we explore the features of local ordering in Central Asia in more detail in the next section, it is worth mentioning the main arguments brought forward by this body of literature: ‘broad pattern[s] of patronalism grounded in leadership, informality and networking’ (Heathershaw in Reeves, Rasayanagam, and Beyer 2014: 33), relevance of tribalism (Gullette 2002), clan politics (Collins 2003; Schatz 2005), regionalism

⁶ Until now, however, there are numerous IOs and international NGOs active in this region and implementing projects at the intersection of peacebuilding and development.

(Jones-Luong 2004), clientelism (Radnitz 2010), neopatrimonialism (Ilkhamov 2007), as well as a persistent importance of Soviet legacies (Isaacs 2010). The existing body of literature also points to the continuous relevance of customary law (Bichsel 2009; Beyer 2016), conflict containment by harmony ideologies (Reeves 2014; Beyer and Gierke 2015), paternalistic concepts of a wider family (Mostowlansky 2013), collective identities and religious beliefs (McBrien 2017; Boboyorov 2020), and everyday practices of joint work, mutual help, and coping (Ismailbekova 2013). Variations and relics of customary orders⁷ have been observed mostly in rural areas of Central Asia (for Kyrgyzstan: Reeves 2014, 2015; Ismailbekova 2017; Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020; Khamidov, Megoran and Heathershaw 2018; Kutmanaliev 2018; for Tajikistan: Heathershaw 2009a; Boboyorov 2013; and for Uzbekistan: Berg 2004; Urinboev 2011).

While peace studies have not picked up these findings, area studies scholars have also rarely referred to peace researchers. So far, few researchers have tried to make the link between the two by highlighting the relevance of customary orders for societal perceptions of peace (Bichsel 2009; Beyer 2016; Lewis 2016), exploring experiential perspectives on international interventions (Megoran et al. 2014; Reeves 2015; Lottholz 2018b; Kluczevska 2019a, 2019b), and analysing local navigations in view of (im)mobility and translocality (Crossroads Asia 2011–2017; Darieva, Mühlfried, and Tuite 2018; Kim 2018). Yet, it is this kind of insight on ordering that is needed to anchor and advance peacebuilding and development from the ground up.

Summarizing, the post-liberal debate could advance by better engaging with existing social anthropological and area studies on local ordering(s). In what follows, the paper attempts to bring these two bodies of literature closer by confronting local ordering with ordering of IOs along the four key components of our conceptual approach.

⁷ These are social practices of customization, in other words, ‘cultural technique[s] by which actors frame and eventually come to perceive cultural norms, values, and practices as their own’ in times of social change (Beyer 2015: 57–60, 66). Other scholars speak of ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 12), of ‘indigenization’ (Appadurai 1998) or ‘Nostrifizierung’ (Elwert 2000: 69).

3 Local orderings and ordering of IOs

3.1 *Cultural beliefs and norms*

3.1.1 *Local orderings*

Cultural beliefs are worldviews and ideas that underlie communal life. They include specific understandings of community, authority, or gender norms, which are cornerstones of social cohesion locally. For many community members, rituals (e.g. symbols, ceremonies) grounded in these beliefs tend to have a prescriptive character. Such beliefs determine the ways societies deal with conflict, which is essential for ordering and peace formation. These ways can be very diverse. For example, contrary to liberal contexts where conflict and direct contestation are perceived as a positive and necessary requirement for social change (Dahrendorf 1974), in customary and patronal contexts conflict containment by harmony ideologies, avoidance or silencing is preferred for cultural, historical, and political reasons. It makes a difference whether people understand peace as cooperation, trust, justice, and pluralism ('positive peace' according to Galtung 1967), or whether they prioritize social unity, hierarchical authority, and economic well-being as the basis for peaceful life (Lewis 2016).

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While cultural beliefs transform only over generations and are overall resistant to external interferences, they constantly adapt to social change. Especially under conditions of global mobility, local orderings cannot be viewed as sealed containers of traditions. Local orderings do not lose importance when multiple geographical spaces and social configurations influence local practices, but they are no longer confined to one locality. In their search for resources and certainty, people often mobilize their local networks (family members, neighbours, and friends) to navigate between places and across borders. While their navigations often reflect customary concepts and practices (Boedeker et al. 2014), online communication and international migration expose them to a complex inter-meshing of levels, norms, and time horizons, in addition to other forms of ordering. As a result, processes of local ordering are often influenced by multiple belongings, (cultural) hybridization, and trans-locality, which facilitate the formation of new subjectivities in the context of 'actors' simultaneous situatedness' in multiple locations and social spaces (Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018: 27–28). The resulting diversity of beliefs, practices, and institutions can lead to norm and identity conflicts. Common examples of this process are clashes between patriarchal values (with regard to gender, family, and religion) and individual liberties, which advance empowerment and non-discrimination (such as LGBT rights).

Turning to empiric examples, in the Central Asian context we find cultural beliefs that are characterized by paternalistic and communitarian concepts of ordering. Often elders and patrons play leading roles in local communities where many people are accustomed to mutual help and joint work, but also to informal social control (Bichsel 2009). We find this kind of traditional ordering grounded in collective identities – based on kinship, customs, and religion – predominantly in rural areas, but it also persists in urban communities (Beyer 2016). It relies on strong relationality, loyalty, and social cohesion based on everyday practices and institutions. While, undoubtedly, there are variations between beliefs and practices among countries and communities in Central Asia, they nevertheless share some common features. Their origins often date back to pre-Soviet customary law, but they also integrate elements of Soviet-era communalism. Despite the globalization trends that have been advancing in Central Asia since 1991, local orders have not become a relic of the past; rather, there are ongoing processes of re-traditionalization in the region, manifested, for example, in the renaissance of Islam, coming from above and below (Beyer and Finke 2019).

A basic cultural belief related to peaceful ordering in Central Asia can be found in ‘harmony ideologies.’⁸ Among local communities, harmony grounded in sensitivity, mutual respect, and trust, but also in generosity, is understood as a basis for peaceful coexistence of various social groups and a way to approach potential tensions among them (for corresponding concepts in five Central Asian countries, see Table 1 below). The notion of harmony is primarily practice-oriented and socially demanding. As Madeleine Reeves emphasized, it ‘is premised less upon the liberal subject who recognizes the other’s right to enjoy freedom and security [Russian: *tolerantnost’*] than on the enactment of social obligations that are gender and generationally marked’ (Reeves, Rasayanagam, and Beyer 2014: 234). She argued that a belief in harmony can be also found in Soviet-era slogans related to interethnic harmony, unity, and solidarity (Reeves 2015: 83).

Harmony ideologies, and their corresponding relics, variations, or adaptations, can be observed in many multi-ethnic communities in Central Asia – where ethnic composition does not correspond to national borders and where Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, and other smaller ethnic groups often live together. For instance, in his fieldwork in the Jabbor Rasulov district in northern Tajikistan, Khushbakht Hojiev has observed a similar framing of ‘living in peace and harmony’ among an ethnically diverse community – composed mainly of Tajiks and Uzbeks. Here, common frames such as ‘we have a common past’, ‘we have common problems’, and ‘we have been living in peace and harmony’ appeared to guide the community through memories

⁸ Harmony ideologies have been first studied by social anthropologist Laura Nader (1990) among the Zapotec in Mexico. They have also been observed in emic discourses in Ethiopia and throughout Central Asia (Beyer and Gierke 2015).

of conflict in the past, the hardship of common work in the present, and hope for a peaceful future (Hojiev and Kreikemeyer 2018). Similarly, based on his fieldwork in the Khatlon district in southern Tajikistan, Hafiz Boboyorov showed how cultural beliefs in harmony go hand in hand with deeply rooted practices of conflict avoidance. His ethnographic research suggested that the local population is rather familiar with the unwritten law according to which communal conflicts are interpreted as ‘village secrets’, public criticism is not appreciated, and public court hearings are unusual (Boboyorov 2020). In the case of Central Asia, conflict containment via secrecy is not only deeply rooted in customary orders on a grassroots level, but also reflects the governments’ insistence on non-interference in internal affairs (Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018; Lewis and Sanyaeva 2020).

Summarizing, many of the ways in which communities deal with conflict are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs. It is ethnographic research that can help us understand the normative bases of, for example, harmony ideologies and corresponding practices – given that they cannot be easily replaced with norms of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and development promoted from outside.

Table 1: Local concepts related to peace formation in Central Asia at the community level

Local Concepts	Kazakh	Kyrgyz	Russian	Tajik	Turkmen	Uzbek
Harmony	<i>yntymaq-tastq, birlik</i>	<i>yntymak kerek</i>	<i>garmoniya</i>	<i>hamsozi, muvofiqlat</i>	<i>sazlaşyk, özara utgaşyklyk</i>	<i>uyg'unlik, özaro totuvlik</i>
Peace, calmness and stability	<i>türaqtas-tylyq, beibitshilik</i>	<i>tynchtyk, turuk-tuuluk</i>	<i>mir, spokoystvie, stabilnost'</i>	<i>tinjivu amoni</i>	<i>parahatlyk, asudalyk, parahatçylyk</i>	<i>tinchlik va osoyishtalik</i>
Custom and habit	<i>salt, дәstür, ädet</i>	<i>ürp adat, salt</i>	<i>obychay, privychka</i>	<i>urfu odat</i>	<i>däp, дәp-dessur, adat, düzgün, düzgün-tertip</i>	<i>urf odat</i>
Joint work	<i>asar, birlesip zhūmys isteu</i>	<i>ashar</i>	<i>dobrovolnaya vzaimopomosh'</i>	<i>hashar</i>	<i>kömek, bilelik, bileleşiklik, arkalaşyklyk</i>	<i>hashar</i>
Mutual help	<i>zhärdem, qol üshyn беру</i>	<i>zhardam</i>	<i>vzaimopomosh'</i>	<i>yordan kardan, yori bayni hamdigari</i>	<i>arkalaşyk, özara kömek, birek-birege kömek</i>	<i>özaro yordam</i>

3.1.2 Ordering of IOs

International norms are IOs’ counterpart of cultural beliefs characterizing local ordering. While customary orders prescribe standards of ‘proper’ behaviour of community members at a micro-level, international norms define

standards of state behaviour, both domestically and in the international arena, at macro and meso-levels. As Ann Florini (1996: 364) succinctly puts it, norms are ‘the sense of “ought”, [...] of how an actor should behave.’ While states are the ones who should behave in a certain way, IOs serve as teachers of norms to states and communities (Finnemore 1993). IOs diffuse norms among its member states, partners, and aid recipients in contexts where they implement peacebuilding and development projects. They also enforce compliance through formal and informal mechanisms, such as internal conditionality (Fawn 2013), naming and shaming (Forsythe 2006), sharing of expert knowledge (Boswell 2009), and conditionality of funding (Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King 2016). Just as cultural beliefs refer to a ‘self-evident and natural order [that has] been internalized, naturalized, and taken as a given’ (Millar 2014: 505), norms are taken as given by IOs. Norms constitute these organizations’ ideological founding stones and set orientations with regard to how the world should be organized and governed, with IOs’ support.

Nearly each organization promotes its own set of norms, depending on mandates and missions in specific contexts where IOs operate. But IOs’ interpretations of norms might differ. For example, both the World Bank and the United National Development Programme (UNDP) promote the good governance norm. However, the former sees it as ‘capable, efficient, open, inclusive, and accountable institutions’ (World Bank 2020), thus focusing on functioning of state structures rather than the regime type per se, while the latter links good governance with democratic, participatory forms of governance, and the broader peace and development agenda (UNDP 2021). Despite such variations, what most norms promoted by Western-dominated IOs have in common is an underlying belief in universality of individual rights and freedom. Consequently, most, if not all, Western-funded peacebuilding projects include activities which advance conflict settlement through the principles of equality, inclusion, and accountability as a key element of good governance – irrespective of age, gender, and social status of community members.

In some collectivist and hierarchical contexts, however, liberal values promoted by IOs might be viewed as western-centric, patronizing, and disrespectful of local traditions, even if they are guided by noble intentions of the interveners (see e.g. Lemay-Hébert 2009). The lack of legitimacy of IOs on the ground is often strengthened by local actors’ perception that despite the rhetoric of dialogue, partnership, and local ownership (Donais 2008; Narten 2008), their voice has rarely been considered in the design and implementation of interventions.

Some scepticism towards norms promoted by IOs can be observed in the Central Asian region, where, as mentioned above, IOs have arrived right after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the context of the collapse of the Soviet political system and command economy, the emergence of independent states provided IOs with an opportunity to integrate this part of the world

into the liberal world order. This happened through funding of programmes and projects aiming at promoting democracy and free market economy – with concessional loans and humanitarian aid serving as incentives (Broome 2010; Sievers 2003). In the 1990s, Central Asian policymakers were generally receptive, at least on the surface, and did not contest norms which IOs promoted on the ground (Rudzite and Kluczevska 2021: 333). This gradually changed in the 2000s with the consolidation of new governance systems in the region and the crystallization of new nation- and state-building priorities. These modes of governance, described later by some scholars as patronal, illiberal, and authoritarian (Hale 2015; Owen et al. 2018), significantly deferred from the liberal paradigm underlying IOs' interventions. In the face of open contestations, which started to emerge in the last decade, some IOs were 'socialized' to local rules rather than socializing local actors into the liberal world order (Lewis 2012; Kluczevska 2017; Isaacs 2018). Other organizations started paying more attention to the newly created neoliberal civil society, which, in their eyes, seemed to be a more reliable ally than state actors resisting liberal norms. This process manifested through the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the region. This type of civil society turned out to be more receptive of donor-promoted norms than national governments. Yet, this happened largely due to availability of funding and, consequently, increasing financial dependence of NGOs on international donors, rather than as a result of a normative conversion of local activists (Simpson 2006; Kluczevska and Foroughi 2021).

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While engaging extensively with NGOs which, at least officially, accepted liberal values, IOs ignored religiously-inspired, mainly Islamic concepts of civil society organized around mosques and centred around the five pillars of Islam (see Roy 2002: 184–186; Lemon, Vesterbye, and Jardine 2021; Peyrouse and Nasritdinov 2021). The reason of this non-engagement lies in a non-liberal value system of this segment of local civil society. This example is representative of IOs' sceptical attitude towards a hierarchical and gendered character of communitarian ordering with notions of strong authority and social harmony (see Bichsel 2009; Reeves 2014; Lewis 2016). From the perspective of many Western IOs, engaging with actors who preached non-liberal values would compromise their own normative foundations.

The recent trend to mainstream resilience into development projects, which foresees at least some degree of engagement with communal forms of ordering with the aim to promote self-reliance and self-governance, has not changed the selective nature of IOs' engagement with local actors in Central Asia. Despite a promising rhetoric, so far, the promotion of resilience did not result in more respect of IOs for local belief systems. IOs which, at least discursively, recognized the need to engage with local actors are still unsure about how, from a normative point of view, such engagement should look like in practice (see Bossuyt and Davletova 2022).

3.1.3 *Comparison*

Resulting from these two descriptions, significant differences can be identified with regard to foundational values underlying cultural beliefs of local ordering and international norms of IOs. These differences become visible when liberal concepts of conflict transformation through empowerment and inclusion encounter patronal practices of communitarian avoidance by coping and silencing. As we showed taking the example of Central Asia, local orderings often privilege conflict containment, while IOs' ordering mostly prefers conflict resolution. Similar differences become apparent concerning the diverging approaches to peace. In Central Asia, local ordering relies heavily on strong top-down authority, economic well-being, and social unity (Lewis 2016) through gender and age stratification, while IOs advocate for liberal, democratic peacebuilding that focuses equally on individual rights and freedoms of all members of the community. In both cases, potential changes to cultural beliefs and international norms would be very slow. Cultural beliefs are not fixed, nor can they be easily changed from the outside, especially by actors who lack legitimacy on the ground. In turn, IOs see international norms as universal and applicable to all contexts around the world.

Besides the issue concerning the possibility of change, there is a lack of willingness to change on both sides, which is a frequent issue in many contexts where IOs implement peacebuilding and development projects. Central Asia is a case in point here. As it results from the two previous sections, local communities in this region generally do not appreciate external interferences in their internal matters, and most IOs continue operating through top-down norm diffusion rather than a dialogical, multi-level norm creation. This, however, does not mean that rapprochement of IOs with the local is not feasible. To a large extent, this is already happening informally, especially among IO staff working on the ground.⁹ At an institutional level, however, opening up to cultural beliefs characterizing local ordering does not mean that IOs need to accept values which sometimes contradict their own principles. Yet, they would need to start multiple dialogues in various local contexts – dialogues which would require time, renounce on easy, standardized solutions, envisage readiness to experiment, respect positions of all participants, and, importantly, accept normative diversity.

⁹ Interviews with OSCE representatives in field offices in Central Asia in March 2022 show that these officers have a clear understanding of the relevance of local customs, culture, and habits; however, they fear to integrate such concepts and practices in order to avoid being co-opted by the locals.

3.2 *Everyday practices*

3.2.1 *Local orderings*

Everyday practices, the second component of local ordering, refer to fluid micro-moves which individuals deploy to address daily challenges. Such mundane, pre-political tactics (Millar 2020: 2) can be observed in the way individuals and communities confront everyday challenges (Mitchell 2011: 1625). This involves communicating with each other, caring for relatives, or entering into functional, banal transactions, such as buying food products (Boulding 2000; see also de Certeau 1984). They represent an ideal model of behaviour, standards which people aspire to, or what in a given context is seen as normal or typical. Often, everyday practices are what Harvey Sachs (1984) defined as ‘doing ordinary.’ In this respect, they are largely performative and refer to doing, i.e. creating perceptions of being ordinary, rather than being ordinary *per se*.

Often various components of local orderings are interconnected: everyday practices are embedded in communitarian cultural beliefs, as described above, and local institutions, as we explain below. These practices reveal how through the decisions that people make and the hopes which they have, individuals appease tensions and creatively transform conflicts from the ground up. Depending on the context, everyday practices characterizing local ordering might either prioritize self-reliance, mutual help, or rely on passive adaptations, such as silencing of diversity. Thus, they allow conflict and post-conflict spaces to be effectively and creatively transformed from the ground up (Mac Ginty 2014).

Methodologically, observing something that ‘passes by, passes through’ (Seigworth and Gardiner in Mac Ginty 2014: 550) can pose challenges for policymakers and social researchers. Moreover, the ways in which people resolve potential and actual conflicts through everyday practices are not easy recognizable by outside interveners. This refers in particular to passive practices, such as silencing and coping (Värynen 2019). For this reason, data collection by participant observation, biographical approaches (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Pia 2013; Behr 2018), emotions and embodiment (Mitchell in Millar 2020), and data aggregation by thick description (Geertz 1973) are helpful to grasp how people experience and deal with everyday tensions.

In Central Asia, everyday practices are largely influenced by the lines of custom and habit (Beyer 2016). They are based on strong relationalities and mutual dependencies, as well as unwritten rules of reciprocity (Temirkulov 2011), joint work, mutual help, social control, and communal conflict settlement (for regional concepts, see Table 1 above). Following Henry Hale’s reasoning, everyday practices can be seen as part of a broader picture of ‘[p]

atronal politics [...] in societies where individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments through chains of actual acquaintance' (Hale 2015: 9).

In Central Asia, everyday practices rely on economic and social relations, gender and age inequalities, and not rarely injustice (Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020; Kluczevska 2020a). Some practices legitimize exploitation of already marginalized groups and suppression of people who might oppose injustice. As Hafiz Boboyorov (2020) shows in his analysis of collective identities in southern Tajikistan, there is also a broad range of practices aiming at preventing social discontent through either co-optation or ostracization. While these practices might be rare, they are nevertheless part of an overall conflict containment model which could also be interpreted as examples of everyday diplomacy (Mac Ginty 2014: 8–9) that operates through avoidance, ritualized politeness, code switching, and everyday neighbourliness (for Central Asia see Ismailbekova and Sultanaliev 2012). In their research, Anna Kreikemeyer and Khushbakt Hojiev (2018) also demonstrated how local institution-oriented framing of mutual help and joint work accompanies social interactions, thus enabling a peaceful everyday life in northern Tajikistan. Here, it is worth mentioning Hojiev's example from an interview conducted in 2013 with a local elder and history teacher working in the school in Tojikobod. As the interviewee narrated:

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We [Tajiks] lived together with Uzbeks in one house and shared everything with them. We used to spend most of the time together with our families being in close interaction. They supported us in this very difficult period for our people [poverty in the Soviet era] and this continued until we had built our own houses, after which we moved out of their houses. We were working in the *kolkhoz*¹⁰ during the day and building our houses during the night. It was not an easy time. (Hojiev and Kreikemeyer 2018: 132)

This kind of framing forms part of broader harmony ideologies. As an everyday practice, it lays the ground for interethnic solidarity networks between multiple ethnicities living in the same locality – which is a common condition across Central Asia.

3.2.2 Ordering of IOs

While routinized practices of individuals play a strong role in local ordering at the community level, IOs' practices primarily revolve around a com-

¹⁰ Soviet-era collective farm.

plex bureaucratic apparatus and rigid operational procedures. There are, of course, significant distinctions between various IOs, stemming for example from their member states and missions. However, what unites them is that, on a daily basis in the peacebuilding and development context, IOs operate through projects. They correspondingly see the world through the project lens. In this regard, ‘seeing like an international organization’ (Broome and Seabrooke 2012), also through the logic of projects, is an important analytical step, which allows us to explore how organizational principles guide IOs’ actions in the field.

Donor-funded projects rely on logframes, which categorize social dynamics into inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact. In most cases, IOs’ *modus operandi* through projects prioritizes a one-size-fits-all approach, prefers formalized service solutions, and rarely enables significant readjustments in the course of project duration. The projectization of peacebuilding and development interventions was criticized by scholars already several decades ago (see Honadle and Rosengard 1983). From the angle of efficiency, IOs have been scrutinized for complex management procedures, which hinder reaching pre-set goals (Boakye and Liu 2016). This suggests that, in terms of a potential rapprochement between IOs and local communities, everyday practices of IOs which are related to project cycles do not facilitate meaningful exchanges with local actors.

Given that IOs operate through projects, they also interact with local actors through projects, for example by launching calls for project proposals from local NGOs. In this way, IOs’ planning results in moulding the communities’ informal ordering practices to fit the logic of pre-existing logframes. This is because in order to be ‘heard’ internationally, problems faced by local communities need to be framed in a way which resonates with missions, mandates, and programmes of a specific IO that issued a corresponding call for applications. Thus, to obtain funding, local actors need to master a development language, which Andrea Cornwall (2007) succinctly described as ‘buzzwords and fuzz-words.’ Without being framed through lenses of participation, empowerment, sustainability, and, more recently, resilience, local practices simply cannot be included in projects. In this way, projects become a tool of neoliberal governance that reshapes local routinized practices to fit pre-existing, standardized schemes (Krause 2014). Similarly, the solutions to local problems supported by IOs are not grounded in local practices but reflect the so-called best international practices – another catchphrase of IOs.

IOs’ activities in Central Asia have not been an exception to this trend. Some scholars of and from the region have even described donor-funded peacebuilding and development as ‘projectosis’ (Foroughi 2017: 296), a pathology which makes IOs focus on percentages of implementation rates rather than trying to do meaningful work on the ground by, for example, forging relations with a broad range of local actors. Our long-term fieldwork in Central Asia

also points to similar limitations. On the individual level, we observe a broad range of views of both local and international staff of IOs on local orderings, ranging from open disrespect to genuine willingness to design projects by better taking into account the local context. These views, however, do not automatically translate into the institutional level, which makes part of a top-down international aid system characterized by orthodox planning – which significantly limits the possibility to open up for local agency and locally led initiatives.

This modality of work has had a profound impact on NGOs working in the region, i.e. the preferred local partners of IOs, by subordinating their everyday work to funding cycles and international rather than addressing local priorities – a trend that has been widely criticized in academic literature (e.g. Pierobon 2021; Kim 2022). Given the scarcity, and most often complete unavailability of other forms of funding, local activists find themselves competing with each other for donor grants, and not always in a fair way (Kluczevska 2019a: 261–262). By doing so, through their *modus operandi*, IOs have been indirectly reshaping local beliefs and worldviews, as well as communitarian forms of solidarity and mutual help, by promoting the logic of capital accumulation and fierce competition in the sphere of grassroots civic activism.

However, this does not mean that there have been no attempts by IOs to engage with local forms of ordering, including local practices. For example, after the violent ethnic clashes in Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, several IOs promoted local women leaders in peacebuilding initiatives (Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020). At first, this resembles a step forward, in that IOs manifested willingness to include locally established practices, i.e. mediation by informal women leaders, in their projects. In practice, however, such collaborations proved to be largely top-down. The type of involvement which IOs envisaged for women, as representatives of local communities, did not correspond to local customs, in which women play a decisive but not a direct role and participate in local politics from behind the scenes and only with permission of their husbands (Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020: 496–498). Thus, by promoting women as local mediators in an egalitarian manner, IOs tried to reshape the local gender order based on complementarity of gender roles. This proved to be a challenge for women leaders, forcing them to creatively combine international and local values, and deliver IOs' peacebuilding-related messages to local communities in 'in a culturally acceptable way' (Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020: 496), by mixing the liberal peace rhetoric with local family values, to avoid backlash from their communities.

Notably, as this example indicates, even in a constrained environment of reporting and rigid organizational principles, local organizations and activists in Central Asia should not be seen as deprived of their agency. Acts of adaptation and reinterpretation of international norms are not uncommon (Kluczevska 2019b; Lottholz 2021; Pierobon 2021). Most often, however,

in fear of losing access to international funding, these local contestations of international norms and practices are not communicated to IOs directly but take forms of subversion within a broader framework of cooperation dictated by funding bodies.

3.2.3 *Comparison*

While everyday local practices and practices of IOs serve similar purposes, which is to ensure everyday functioning and continuity of, respectively, communities and organizations, they are structured in various ways. Local everyday practices are mundane, largely pre-political, micro-moves, which are embedded in cultural beliefs. In the Central Asian region, like in many local contexts, these practices are relational, in that they follow informal rules of personalized exchanges and communication. At IOs, in turn, most everyday practices refer to organizational principles guiding a complex bureaucratic apparatus and enabling communication between multiple levels, including headquarters, regional offices, country officer, NGO partners, and subcontractors. They follow an operational logic of projects and rely on two to three-year-long project cycles and logframes which rarely enable readjustments over the course of these projects.

Clearly, practices characterizing local ordering are predominantly informal, while the ones embedded in IO's ordering are largely formal. What they have in common, however, is their rigidity, which does not facilitate a rapprochement between these two forms of ordering. While through everyday practices community members flexibly respond to socioeconomic challenges, these practices are not flexible in nature, as all community members need to adhere to numerous unwritten standards of behaviour. In Central Asia, these standards refer to the principle of reciprocity, communitarian societal control, and gendered division of labour. IOs' practices, on their part, are rigid because they rely on formalized service solutions and requirements of standardized and largely quantitative measurement systems of intervention effectiveness. Such diversity with regard to the nature of everyday practices has implications for how IOs can engage with the local: the formalization and bureaucratization of their everyday practices do not allow them to engage in relationality and trust with local actors and, for example, ethnographically explore local practices of peaceful ordering before designing projects, let alone flexibly integrate these practices in their projects.

3.3 Institutions

3.3.1 Local orderings

Local institutions, the third component of local orderings, are collectively recognized organizations which facilitate resource distribution and provide orientation to members of a given community (Millar 2014: 505). They have an ordering function, in a way that they determine local social hierarchies and attribute specific roles to community members. In some contexts, they have a formal character and rely on state power for conflict resolution (e.g. police or courts). However, in particular in customary contexts characterized by relationality, institutions are largely informal and structured around factors such as kinship, gender, age, and wealth. In some cases, they can be intertwined with formal institutions and complement them; while in other cases, they may even replace them. The importance and nature of local institutions are reflected in the density and intensity of contacts (e.g. at meetings of elders in tea houses), expressions of respect, social control, and practices of conflict settlement. Especially in customary contexts of strong relationality (Brigg 2013, 2018), informal institutions can assume a rigid character.

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In Central Asia, like in many communal contexts, local institutions are overwhelmingly fixed along the lines of custom and have a largely hierarchical and gendered structure – where male, powerful actors (namely patrons, elders, leading members of the communal state administration) play key roles in decision-making regarding community matters. Their positionalities can overlap and intertwine. Balanced relations within an informal triangle of economic, normative, and administrative institutions, on the one hand, and between them and the population, on the other, are basic requirements for communal harmony and well-being (Schatz 2005; Montgomery 2016). Such an organizational scheme forms the basis of local institutions, like a *mahalla* (neighbourhood unit) or mosques.

Patronalism is rooted in paternalistic concepts of the wider family, according to which men in power are at the top of the pyramid and show leadership by generating and redistributing resources (Mostowlansky 2013; Hale 2015; Megoran 2018). Such patrons are interested in maintaining power, as well as legitimation, and they are aware that they need to invest in their community by contributing to common infrastructure – building a road or a canal – to obtain the support of the population in local elections. To achieve legitimacy, patrons need to balance their relations with local normative and administrative power centres and elites via behavioural conventions (i.e. rituals, see Khamidov, Megoran, and Heathershaw 2018). For example, in order to legitimize their actions in front of local communities, they might require a blessing from local elders, which they can receive symbolically by inviting them to

break their fast at the end of *Ramadan*, the Muslim fasting period. In similar, but less visible ways, patrons have to demonstrate their respect for members of local state agencies, who themselves rely on the reputation and knowhow of patrons and elders, while also trying to co-opt and control them (Temirkulov 2013; Bliss and Neumann 2014; Kreikemeyer 2020b).

In Central Asia, communal conflict resolution transcends the formal state administration. It is the task of elders, who are perceived as wise and experienced men equipped with normative authority and ‘associational power’ in the community (Bichsel 2009: 75, 143). They have enough authority to directly interact and negotiate with mayors and heads of the district administrations on behalf of their communities. Overall, elders enjoy respect due to their age and associated life experience, charisma, and integrity, but they also need to respect the knowledge and material power of younger men and women, as well as be open to social change (Beyer 2006, 2013; Bichsel 2009; Reeves, Rasayanagam, and Beyer 2014).

Importantly, the dominance of men in the public life of Central Asian communities does not mean that women do not play any role in local ordering. Often, elderly women or women with a professional reputation (e.g. school directors, doctors, NGO-leaders, female religious teachers) are locally seen as women leaders who are allowed to informally take the lead to address social concerns (Satybaldieva 2018). These women use indirect practices of mediation from behind-the-scenes by motivating communal male authorities, staying in close informal contact with elders and participating in discussions about local conflicts. They do it by ‘bargaining with patriarchy’ (Kandiyoti 1988, in Ismailbekova and Megoran 2020). Most women leaders would not dare to publicly criticize the authorities, as this would be perceived as violating customary family values. Nonetheless, socially respected women are able to put a stop to violent conflicts, as it was the case in 2010 in an ethnically divided society in Aravan in Southern Kyrgyzstan, where women mediated with elders, patrons, and the police to avoid an outbreak of violence among male youth (Khamidov 2018). In brief, whilst the role of women in local ordering possesses an informal character and, at least on a surface level, seems secondary, it is argued that women’s support to local institutions constitutes an institution in its own right.

3.3.2 Ordering of IOs

Institutions which are part of IOs’ ordering significantly differ from the ones which are relevant among local communities. Important institutions at the micro-level are largely informal and grounded in customary law and order, whereas the institutional framework of IOs is predominantly formal, compartmentalized, and highly bureaucratized. While informal institutions can

assume a rigid character too, they use different means than IOs to achieve durability and everyday functioning.

Insights on the sociology of IOs prove useful here, as they explain how the organization of these institutions impacts on their performance (Ness and Brechin 1988; Barnett and Finnemore 1999). The institutional architecture of IOs is composed of many levels. It includes headquarters, regional, country, and field offices, as well as private and public organizations, both nongovernmental and business ones to which project components are outsourced. Overall, hundreds to thousands of people circulate between involved offices and units of specific IOs. Peacebuilding and development projects reflect this structure, as they involve a broad range of interconnected units at various levels, each with different priorities and sometimes also different funding mechanisms. At each level of IOs, there are many employees with different tasks, to mention but a few: international staff, officers and managers, assistants, consultants, researchers, and translators.

Looking at the corporate ontology of IOs sheds a new light on how we understand their agency and autonomy of action (see Ellis 2010; Baling and Wehrenfenning 2011). The multiplicity of units and compartmentalization of labour has self-limiting effects: it diffuses responsibility and hampers communication within IOs, and also between IOs and local actors. Moreover, a long chain of intermediaries hinders implementation of strategic decisions taken at the headquarters level on the ground, by gradually depoliticizing them along the way. This is one of the reasons why strategic documents foregrounding local ownership, adopted at central levels of IOs, do not translate into practice. Vice versa, the feedback from project beneficiaries, for example their discontent with specific projects, often does not reach headquarters and therefore cannot facilitate changes within IOs. Overall, the institutions of IOs' ordering are not only not receptive to changes, but also safeguard the status quo. This, however, does not mean that societies in which projects are implemented should be regarded as victims or passive objects of IOs' interventions. There are many co-constitutions in these often symbiotic relationships between IOs, governments, and societies. Moreover, as argued by James Scott (1985) in his seminal work, the 'weak' can deploy a number of subtle strategies to withstand the domination and reverse negative power relations. Local NGOs, for example, quickly learn how project development and implementation work. In many cases their staff not only know how to perform vis-à-vis the donors, 'speaking' like a project, bridging the gaps, and mediating between local authorities and IOs (Kluczevska 2019a, 2019b, 2020b; Megoran and Ismailbekova 2020).

The institutional complexity of IOs has cognitive consequences. It impacts on how these organizations learn about local forms of ordering, and, consequently, how they can relate to these forms and build ties with actors on the ground. One common feature of IOs' learning about the local concerns their

reliance on Western research institutions which provide knowledge on the social fabric in aid-receiving contexts (Goetze 2019). This results in filtering, reframing, and depoliticizing local practices in order to make them understandable to international audiences. Ultimately, learning is reduced to gathering more detailed data about local ordering(s) in order to more effectively reshape local institutions into Western-like governance institutions, rather than trying to really understand local actors, engaging with them in a respectful way, taking time for dialogue, building trust, and collaborating on an equal footing (Lottholz 2018a). Another common feature of IOs is a strong preference for standardized and largely quantitative systems of measurement of intervention effectiveness and change on the ground (Cooley and Snyder 2015). This, as André Broome and Leonard Seabrooke (2012: 6) argued, enables these organizations ‘to link a diagnosis of the causes of a problem with a generic prescription for policy solutions.’ Precisely such administrative standardization allows IOs to propose the aforementioned best international practices to tackle local problems.

Many of these institutional features and resulting cognitive schemes can be observed in international interventions in Central Asia – as our research and the existing body of literature confirms. Since their arrival in this region in the 1990s, IOs have only partnered with a specific group of local stakeholders, namely the ones who are able create a congruence in thinking with their international partners, such as the aforementioned NGOs. These partnerships have mostly taken the form of donor-recipient relationships, where IOs serve as donors to their local partners. This has significantly limited local NGOs’ abilities to implement peacebuilding and development projects according to their own assessment of needs on the ground (Kluczevska 2019a, 2019b; Pierobon 2021). The types of relations which have emerged between NGOs and their donors point to a rather selective and programmed engagement with local communities on part of IOs. While donor-funded NGOs are undoubtedly part of local civil society, they are only one of the many forms of civil society existing in the region – arguably the most liberally-oriented and internationally-networked one. This aspect of IOs’ work, referring to selective engagement with the local, is by no means limited to Central Asia, but rather represents a common feature of IOs’ interventions around the world.

Like in other contexts where IOs operate, their institutional framework created obstacles for these organizations which limits their potential to learn about Central Asia from local actors. For the last thirty years, IOs’ knowledge production about Central Asia has been a domain of Western and Western-based consultants and research institutions rather than local scholars. Local researchers were mostly engaged in research commissioned by IOs only because of their fluency in local languages, and not as a result of recognition of their research skills (Sabzalieva 2020: 104–105). As a result, most often their role has been limited to the provision of raw data, which was then analysed by Western researchers, often with limited knowledge of the local context

(Kluczevska 2020b). When IOs have actually engaged with local researchers, these collaborations have often had a performative and self-legitimizing function. Creating the impression to engage with local scholars aimed to strengthen the reputational authority of IOs on the ground and increase their leverage vis-à-vis other IOs (Korneev 2018).

3.3.3 *Comparison*

Several distinctions emerge from this juxtaposition of two types of institutions. While institutions of local orderings and IOs' ordering have similar practical and symbolic functions, they operate on very different levels. Local institutions have societal relevance and a communal range: they provide orientation to community members and facilitate resource distribution. IOs' institutional framework has a supra- or intergovernmental relevance and an international range. It is compartmentalized, bureaucratized, and composed of multiple international, regional, national, and local levels and units. At the same time, legitimacy criteria of institutions which are important to these two forms of ordering seem to be mutually exclusive. In Central Asia, such locally relevant institutions are neither elected nor appointed. Rather, they are legitimized by and structured around personal characteristics such as kinship, gender, age, religiosity, and wealth. Although these institutions are largely informal, they are based on broad collective approval and thus can have a rigid character. In fact, academic literature hardly ever mentions open contestations of local customary institutions in Central Asia – and those who contest them, such as LGBT activists, usually leave their community and even country. IOs' institutions, in turn, are legitimized by these organizations' mandates. Moreover, IO officials are chosen through an official selection process which takes into account their thematic competences and experiences – even if in such a process there is space for informal recommendation practices.

One practical implication of such institutional diversity is that local NGOs, i.e. actors who are seen by IOs as intermediary actors between the international and local levels, in that they act as legitimate representatives of local communities, are not necessarily perceived in the same way by these communities. Consequently, interactions between IOs and local actors often have a performative character and safeguard the status quo by securing international funding for carefully selected (and remodelled) locals, the NGOs.¹¹

¹¹ In an online interview on 31 March 2022 an OSCE representative said: 'We are working with these [local] NGOs for ten years now, we know each other very well.'

3.4 *Issues of power*

3.4.1 *Local orderings*

The fourth component of local ordering are power relations, which concern actors' ability to influence the behaviour of others – both individually and structurally. Issues of power implicitly structure relationships between those who make decisions and set the rules and those who obey. Power at the micro-level is a relational (not necessarily fixed) ordering force, as it is embedded in mental models, habitus, and institutions (Mielke, Schetter, and Wilde 2011). Local power relations usually result from a mixture of cultural beliefs and socioeconomic conditions. They can be apparent or subtle, but in both cases they are easily understandable by all community members. The formal state is just one among many existing actors in local power relations. Power is distributed not only based on actors' influence on policymaking and policy implementation, but it might also include factors such as custom and religion (Millar 2014: 502). In practice, state bureaucratic structures are often intertwined with informal institutions legitimized by custom, religion, or loyalty networks (Millar 2014; Steenberg 2019). In addition, the influence of international mobility on local ordering should not be underestimated. Especially in transitional contexts, various orders follow different rules, which can intersect and result in hybridity (Dewey, Miguez, and Sain 2017), as well as increase the risk of societal conflicts. For example, this can happen when local actors following customary patronalism attend internationally-funded workshops promoting liberal civil society and women's empowerment.

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In the Central Asian context, power concentration and power struggles among competing networks, as well as corresponding factionalism, are one of the main challenges of local ordering (Boboyorov 2020; Hale 2015). Often, elites and political leaders in this region live off of corruption, and, additionally, an economy of rents and illegal offshore practices gained ground locally (Cooley and Heathershaw 2017). These practices ultimately lead to the establishment of a state–crime nexus, or even state capture (Radnitz 2010; Cornell and Jonsson 2014). The more the ruling regimes follow 'authoritarian conflict management' (Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018) and act primarily as sources of security for local economic elites, the more they become dysfunctional in relation to their societies (Juraev in Kreikemeyer 2017). When competing patrons mobilize support among young men, violence can quickly erupt, particularly in societies divided along the ethnic lines and with regard to access to resources, such as land or water.

While many communities are accustomed to power concentration, governmental control, and dysfunctional state administrations, it would be an oversimplification to say that all community members find these traits of local ordering legitimate. As mentioned above, cases of open or hidden resistance

against established power relations are not uncommon. In many cases subversion is countered through sophisticated means of silencing or co-optation (see e.g. Boboyorov 2020). In other cases, local population manifests contestations through protests, for example in Min-Kush in the Naryn province in Kyrgyzstan, where people demonstrated against ecological risks resulting from uranium waste stored locally (OSCE Aarhus Centre Kyrgyzstan 2020).

In Central Asia the state and the societies often appear to be worlds apart (Kluczevska 2020a). Power does not really trickle down to the societal level in ‘virtual’ (Heathershaw 2014) or ‘strong-weak states’ (Migdal 1994) and, consequently, many governmental decisions lack legitimacy (Megoran 2006: 52). Many communities in Central Asia have long ceased to rely solely on the state. They realize all too well that their well-being largely depends on their ability to mobilize informal local networks, engage in practices of mutual help, and try to complement the official dysfunctional systems (Reeves, Rasayanagam, and Beyer 2014). However, such efforts for compensation encounter limitations, as many local communities are confronted with mass-scale labour migration to Russia and beyond. In countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, everyday life in rural areas is often characterized by socioeconomic hardships and subsequent emigration of young men and, increasingly, also women. In Central Asia we also observe trans-local influences of diaspora networks, student mobility, or the emergence of Islamic banking, as an alternative to the capitalist economy (Crossroads Asia Research Network 2011–2017; CrossAreaStudies 2018). In particular, younger generations and stigmatized minorities, such as the LGBT community and opposition groups, benefit from additional options for relationality offered by mobility and electronic communication – trying to find new sources of power and influence.

Moreover, given that migrants find themselves embedded in multiple normative layers simultaneously, elder people and local customary institutions might gradually lose their authority and legitimacy. This shows that local communities are confronted with challenges of hybridization and fragmentation, which might result in additional normative, identity, and power conflicts. In the context of an ongoing precarity and fragmentation, communities risk to fall apart and the society becomes increasingly atomized (Kluczevska 2020a: 566). Yet power hierarchies do not disappear. Rather, as the society changes, old power relations are replaced by new, emerging types of dominance and dependence.

3.4.2 *Ordering of IOs*

Like in local ordering, power plays a big role in ordering of international institutions, too. Power is visible in institutional arrangements, inter-institutional relations, and hierarchies which emerge along the chain of actors involved in

implementation of peacebuilding and development projects, including donor agencies, the headquarters, regional offices, country offices, and a range of local subcontractors. While power at the micro-level is dependent on factors such as custom and religion, power in IOs largely depends on geopolitics and funding.

The ongoing search for ways to improve international-local interactions suggests that many IOs are willing to engage with local actors. Ultimately, however, IOs are aid givers and local actors aid recipients. This is a structural relation in which a simple rule holds: he who pays the piper calls the tune. Here, power manifests itself in complex relations of financial dependence and accountability of beneficiaries towards donors. Being at the receiving end, local actors inevitably find themselves in a subordinated position. IO-led peacebuilding and development interventions require consent from the host state; however, the design of these projects is deeply embedded in the predominant power structures of the international system. The root causes of local conflicts are often related to the global neoliberal economy which continuously (re-) produces underdevelopment, socioeconomic precarity, and fragmentation on international and local scales (De Mesquita and Smith 2009). Yet, IOs for their part are also subject to negative power relations. They rely on funding from donor states and other third parties, which often advance their foreign policy and economic interests through projects commissioned to IOs (Alesina and Dollar 2000). In this way, donor influence has a negative impact on mandate delivery by IOs (see Thorvaldsdottir, Patz, and Goetz 2022)

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Similar power relations can be observed in IOs' interventions in Central Asia. In the 1990s, IOs clearly had an upper hand in the design of the peacebuilding and development arena in the region, and they approached it from the transitional, democratization angle. The Soviet collapse and the resulting economic crisis, which accompanied the emergence of newly independent states in the region, allowed IOs to gain financial leverage over policymakers and by that have some influence over the political and institutional making across the region (Heathershaw 2009a; Broome 2010). Lack of other sources of funding was also one of the main reasons which enabled IOs to co-opt local civic activists into the newly-founded NGO sector (Buxton 2011: 31–32). Local activists, on their part, benefitted too, as the aid industry provided them with new spaces for action and salaries which allowed them a dignified life in a context of economic precarity after the Soviet collapse (Kluczevska and Foroughi 2021).

These complex power relations between IOs and local actors continued throughout the 2000s and 2010s. In the context of 9/11 and the consequent war on terror, starting with Operation Enduring Freedom in neighbouring Afghanistan, international projects in Central Asia shifted towards a security tangent. Given that Central Asia gained a new, strategic importance for the US (Cooley 2012), other Western donor states followed suit and started

funding security-related projects in the region. Until now, many IO-funded projects are framed around an underlying imperative that Central Asia needs to be stabilized in order to secure the West. This trend has had practical consequences on the ground, as it resulted in the militarization of borders and the strengthening of security services and law enforcement bodies in the region (De Danieli 2011; Rudzite and Kluczevska 2021: 222–235). Such geopolitization of aid does not exclude the existence of independent local agency, but it influences the context in which this agency operates. This, once again, demonstrates that power is a relational force (see Boedeker et al. 2014).

3.4.3 *Comparison*

There are multiple types and levels of power hierarchies characterizing local ordering, IOs' ordering, as well as interactions between IOs and local actors. Many of them are far from mutual understanding and collaborative peace formation. As our examples from Central Asia showed, local communities are frequently accustomed to a patronal type of power concentration, governmental control, and dysfunctional state administrations. IOs, in turn, are subject to negative power relations vis-à-vis their donor states, which often advance their foreign policy goals through provision of project funding.

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As for the interactions between the two types of ordering, power relations manifest themselves in complex relations of financial dependence, resulting subordination, and accountability of aid recipients towards IOs who serve as their immediate donors, rather than the other way around. Being positioned at the end of the financial chain, local actors often appear to be objects rather than subjects of international interventions. Those members of local communities who regularly interact with IOs, i.e. NGOs, tend to follow international, instead of local priorities. As a result, not rarely NGOs' cooperation with IOs is largely performative, in that it mimics the normative and bureaucratic demands of IOs – while everyday work of these organizations remains embedded in existing informal power structures at the micro-level. Acts of subversion by local actors additionally complicate this picture and frequently result in a bigger mistrust of the two parties towards each other. Overall, such complexity of overlapping, explicit, and implicit power hierarchies and power games hinders IOs' capacities to build durable and dialogical relations with local actors even further.

4 Conclusion

This paper aimed to contribute to the long ongoing post-liberal debate by shedding new light on why IOs constantly face problems with international-local interactions during peacebuilding and development interventions. This field of research has always focused on how to improve the cooperation between IOs and local actors, based on an assumption – and a normative aspiration – that the two actors can work together, as soon as IOs start this interaction. The solution for IOs was to improve local ownership by integrating local actors. Against this line of reasoning, our main argument in this paper is that, despite constant attempts to engage with the local, the continuous failure of IOs happens because of an underlying problem that so far has not been discussed in this debate: diverse and in several contexts even incompatible values and norms, practices, institutions, and power relations characterizing the local, on the one hand, and IOs, on the other. Thus, it is not enough to reach out to local actors without simultaneously zooming at IOs and recognizing, as well as understanding the differences between local orderings and ordering of IOs.

As it appears from the juxtaposition of local orderings with ordering of IOs, the *local turn* is challenged not only by operationalization and implementation-related problems. Such problems exist too, for example with regard to the lack of will on part of IOs to leave more space for local agency or inadequate designs of peacebuilding and development projects. Yet even more importantly, the *local turn* has structural limitations inscribed therein. IOs' willingness to engage with local ordering is juxtaposed with a more or less rigid logic underlying their functioning, which can also be seen as a specific form of ordering. Already in the conceptual stages of project design IOs are neither willing nor able to explore and better understand peaceful local ordering(s) in their projects because such incorporation of local values, practices, institutions, and power relations would require IOs to completely rethink their basic normative assumptions and organizational rules. Without recognizing and critically reflecting on its own ordering first, the attempts to create a meaningful dialogue with actors on the ground cannot bear fruit.

Recognizing that there are structural limitations inscribed in the *local turn* is not a fatalistic conclusion, as it does not mean that a rapprochement between local ordering and IO ordering is impossible by definition. Nor does it mean that this rapprochement does not currently happen in practice. As a rich body of critical peacebuilding and development literature tells us, actors on the ground always engage in acts of subtle resistance and re-appropriation of donors' funding and ideas.

The structural conundrum remains, however, and the first step to move forward is that IOs need to take a step back and openly acknowledge the normative and organizational diversity of existing forms of ordering which come

together during international interventions. Such acknowledgement will offer a new starting point, which will require not only reforms of the current international peacebuilding and development system, but more fundamentally, the dismantling and reconstructing of the entire aid system. The main challenge is not to reduce the normative diversity, but to find ways to accommodate it. Here, much more exploration, translation, dialogue, negotiation, and time can help find solutions for coexistence and even cooperation. First and foremost however, is to address the underlying power relations which make it impossible for international and local actors to work on equal footing.

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Abstract

It has become common knowledge that international organizations (IOs) are struggling with local ownership of their peacebuilding and development interventions worldwide. This happens despite the local turn which gained momentum in recent years in peacebuilding research and practice. Drawing on the post-liberal debate and area studies research focusing on conflict settlement, this paper argues that the continued difficulties of IOs to engage with the local needs to be seen in the context of multiple, diverse forms of ordering, namely structured and structuring processes of meaning-making and social interactions. To illustrate this argument, the paper refers to the case of Central Asia. Conceptualizing local orderings emerging from the ground up in communities which are targeted by internationally funded projects, on the one hand, and the underlying logic of ordering characterizing IOs and their interventions, on the other, allows us to see that there are structural differences between them. Following the Ethnographic Peace Research agenda, this paper compares these two ordering mechanisms by focusing on four specific components: cultural beliefs and norms, everyday practices, institutions, and issues of power.

Keywords: Central Asia, ethnography, everyday peace, international development, international interventions, local orderings, peacebuilding, the local

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