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## Local ownership as international governmentality: Evidence from the EU mission in the Horn of Africa

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### ABSTRACT

While some Foucault-inspired studies construe local ownership in international interventions as a form of liberal governmentality that aims to govern through freedom, others lambast it as an illiberal governmentality that is likely to be resisted because it undermines local autonomy. However, we still do not know what is the rationality behind local ownership, how it is being operationalized, and why a principle that aims to govern through freedom ends up curtailing it. I argue that local ownership, echoing the colonial principle of indirect rule, is driven by the rationality of advanced democracies on how best to govern global insecurities at a distance. Consequently, ownership is operationalized as responsabilization for externally designed objectives. This often gives rise to local resistance which undermines international efforts to achieve ownership. I illustrate my arguments with evidence from the EU Mission on Regional Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa (EUCAP Nestor).

**KEYWORDS** Local ownership; interventions; governmentality; European Union; Horn of Africa; EUCAP Nestor

Among countless International Relations (IR) neologisms that have mushroomed in the post-cold war period, local ownership has a pride of place. While the precise meaning of local ownership is contested, it is always based on a premise that international support to peace is only viable if it relies on a certain degree of local capacity and participation. Since the turn of the century, local ownership has become “the gold standard of successful peace and statebuilding” (Dursun-Özkanca & Crossley-Frolick, 2012, p. 251). The European Union (EU) has been at the forefront of this trend by endorsing ownership across its external policies and even claiming it to be a principle “inherent in the European approach to international relations” (EU, 2008, p. 3).

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Despite this strong rhetorical shift, “insufficient local ownership” remains one of the key challenges of international interventions (Paris, 2010, p. 347). Although measuring a degree of ownership remains a methodological challenge, the prevailing consensus among scholars is that ownership is one of the weakest links of contemporary peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions (Donais, 2012, p. 1). The United Nations (UN), which pioneered the concept, for example, has failed to match its rhetoric on ownership with its peacebuilding practice (Von Billerbeck, 2016, p. 4). The EU has also struggled to live up to this principle in its crisis management interventions launched as part of its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) (Dursun-Özkanca, 2017; Ejodus, 2017; Freire & Simão, 2013; Ginsberg & Penksa, 2012; Grevi, Helly, & Keohane, 2009; Merlingen, 2011a, 2011b; Rayroux & Wilén, 2014; Tolksdorf, 2014; Vandemoortele, 2012).

As it has been discussed in the introduction to this special issue (Ejodus & Juncos, *in press*), the local ownership principle has been one of the central themes of the “local turn” in peacebuilding (Donais, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2015). While it is beyond the scope of this article to do justice to this sizable literature, my goal here is to particularly draw on scholarly debates that analyze local ownership through the lenses of Michel Foucault’s (2007, 2008) concept of governmentality. This concept denotes a set of rationalities and techniques for the exercise of power in liberal societies. Although some Foucault-inspired studies in IR have accepted whole cloth the ownership principle as a liberal form of global governance (Best, 2007; Kurki, 2011; Neumann & Sending, 2010), others have criticized it as an illiberal governmentality that serves as a rhetorical cover for imposition (Chandler, 2010; Richmond, 2012). Existing studies, however, neither delve into the governmental rationality behind the local ownership principle, how it is operationalized on the ground, nor do they provide an account why it ends up curtailing autonomy of those who are on the receiving end of interventions.

The central argument of this article is that the contemporary principle of local ownership, echoing the colonial principle of indirect rule, is driven by the political rationality of advanced democracies which launch, finance, and design interventions and not by the political rationality of host states and societies. Disillusioned with the early post-cold war enthusiasm to rapidly export liberal governance abroad, the global North endorsed the local ownership principle as a pragmatic and more sustainable approach to peacebuilding and statebuilding. Consequently, as I demonstrate, ownership is habitually operationalized as a supply-driven responsabilization of host states for externally designed objectives. Finally, in conflict-affected settings, where both state institutions and democracy are weak or non-existent, this alien governmentality often gives rise to various forms of local contestation and resistance that ultimately undermine international efforts to achieve the local buy-in.

My empirical illustrations draw on 30 interviews conducted in Brussels (June 2016) and in Somalia/Somaliland (November 2016) with different stakeholders involved in EUCAP Nestor.<sup>1</sup> The mission was launched in 2012 with an initial mandate of two years to “assist the development in the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean States of a self-sustainable capacity for continued enhancement of their maritime security including counter-piracy, and maritime governance” (EU, 2012, p. 40). Initially, the mission covered five states: Djibouti, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Tanzania. Since March 2015, the mission phased out of the region and focused on Somalia where the problem of piracy originated. In December 2016, the Council of the EU renamed the mission into the Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia) and extended its mandate until December 2018 (EU, 2016, p. 18).

The mission was chosen as the empirical illustration because it is an excellent example of an international governmental effort. Faced with the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the EU launched the mission with the aim of responsabilizing and enabling target states to solve the problem of piracy on their own by subjecting them to a systematic inspection, reform, and monitoring (Merlingen, 2003, 2011a, 2011b). To be sure, the degree of ownership certainly varies from one intervention to another, and the challenges of implementation in EUCAP Nestor are not entirely generalizable. However, I posit that EUCAP Nestor illustrates well the governmental rationality behind the local ownership principle more generally, technology, and techniques through which it is operationalized as well as different modes of local resistance to this alien governmentality.

The article proceeds in the following order. In the first section, I briefly discuss how local ownership has been conceptualized within governmentality studies in IR and what contribution I intend to make to this body of knowledge. In the second section, I discuss the political rationality of local ownership. The third section outlines techniques used to operationalize local ownership, while the fourth section analyses various forms of resistance that all this gives rise to. In conclusion, I discuss implications of the arguments advanced in the article and suggest some ideas for further research.

### **Governmentality studies and local ownership**

Governmentality, a term first coined by Foucault (2007, p. 108), in the broadest possible sense denotes any historic form of rationality of rule. In the narrower sense, governmentality means an ensemble of liberal discourses and practices that have populations as their target and which started to develop in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards. For Foucault, this process implies a shift from the rationality of a sovereign to the rationality of the governed population. This is, what for Foucault (2008) “characterizes

liberal rationality: how to model government, the art of government, how to [found] the principle of rationalization of the art of government on the rational behavior of those who are governed” (p. 312). He then goes on to explain how this new political rationality of governing less—but better, gradually rolled back the state and led to the contemporary post-war neoliberalism.

Foucault’s ideas on governmentality inspired a wider field of governmentality studies (Osborne, Rose, & Barry, 1996). While Foucault’s work started to shape discussions within IR already in the 1980s, in recent years his concept of governmentality has been extensively used to critically interrogate the spread of liberal norms, practices, and institutions in world politics (Kiersey & Stokes, 2013; Larner & Walters, 2004; Merlingen, 2006; Neumann & Sending, 2007). Many IR scholars have characterized local ownership as another form of liberal governmentality in world politics (Best, 2007, p. 96; Kurki, 2011, p. 353; Neumann & Sending, 2010, p. 144). Kurki (2011), for example, writes that “the key aspect of neoliberal governance ... is the emphasis on the local ownership of the processes of decision making” (p. 353).

Others, also drawing on the work of Foucault and his concept of governmentality, have critiqued ownership as an essentially illiberal practice. Richmond (2012), for example, argues that ownership is “illiberal, distant governmentality which is likely to be resisted because it undermines political autonomy, legitimacy and identity” (p. 371). He writes that this resistance nevertheless holds a “potential for a postcolonial form of peace ...” (Chandler & Richmond, 2015, p. 6). Chandler is less optimistic and argues that ownership is an unsalvageable governmental technology of post liberalism, to which the West regressed after the failure of early post-cold war experiment to export its modes of political and economic governance (Chandler, 2010; Chandler & Richmond, 2015).

Such a stark contrast in the interpretation of local ownership stems less from a different understanding of liberalism and more from looking at different aspects of this principle. While the former foreground liberal discourses around the local ownership principle, the latter zoom on the gap between the high liberal rhetoric of ownership and pathologies that occur during its practical operationalization. None of them, however, investigate the political rationality behind this principle. Moreover, the extant governmentality studies of local ownership in IR have missed to provide an account of how and why local ownership turns from an attempt to govern across borders through freedom into a “liberogenic practice” that ends up being resisted for curtailing autonomy of those who are supposed to be liberated (cf. Foucault, 2008, p. 69).

To understand this, it is first important to analytically distinguish discourses from material practices. To be sure, the majority of works on governmentality follow a post-structuralist ontology that is only concerned with discourses. However, such a radically anti-realist meta-theoretical standpoint,

mostly drawing on Foucault's later work, is not the only possible take on governmentality. As it has already been argued before, the concept of governmentality can also be pegged to a "realist ontology" which Foucault himself implicitly espoused in his earlier works (Frauley, 2007). In this paper, I will draw upon this "realist governmentality," which keeps epistemological relativism but goes beyond the focus on text to also include governing practices and their structural and material conditions of existence (Joseph, 2010; McKee, 2009; Stenson, 2005).

Moreover, it is important to make a distinction between domestic and international governmentality. Domestic governmentality, which was studied by Foucault, evolved gradually in the west over the centuries and operates as a power beyond the state. International governmentality, on the other hand, is driven by the political rationality of liberal states and used by them to shape institutions, behavior or policies of democratizing, developing and conflict-affected states. The origins of contemporary international governmentality are in the colonial governmentality (Scott, 1995). The toolbox used by the imperial powers to govern their colonies certainly possessed liberal elements, but the rationality behind was considerably different from the one which transformed Europe from within (Mbembé, 2001; Shani, 2006, pp. 27–28).

International governmentality in the post-colonial era relies even more strongly on subtle methods of governance that aim to regulate social conduct at a distance. Nevertheless, it is less about the regulation of populations and more of an instrument used by powerful states and their international institutions to govern weak ones (Joseph, 2009). But those on the receiving end of interventions do not only have weaker democratic institutions (or none at all), they often lack a state in the Western sense of the term. Due to this unevenness of the international, and often starkly different socio-political conditions in target states, the attempts to use governmentality across borders often fail to achieve their objectives (Joseph, 2010, 2012).

In the rest of this article, I draw on these insights and take them further both theoretically and empirically. To that end, I first genealogically trace the governmental rationality of local ownership back to the late colonial principle of indirect rule. Then I discuss the political technology of ownership, which refers to the way in which this principle is operationalized in practice. Finally, I examine different forms of local resistance to ownership.

### **Political rationality of local ownership**

Political rationality is "the reasoned way of governing best and, at the same time, reflection on the best possible way of governing" (Foucault, 2008, p. 2). Its aim is not only to legitimize, but also to render reality governable. One of Foucault's central preoccupations was the emergence of a liberal rationality of government in Europe. While sovereignty and discipline are

forms of direct power that rest on the rationality of the ruler, liberalism is a form of power that is exercised indirectly (Foucault, 2007, pp. 108–109). Most importantly, it is not based on the rationality of the state, or *raison d'état*, but on the rationality of the governed population. In this section, I argue that local ownership is driven by the rationality of advanced democracies concerned on how best to govern global insecurities at a distance and I trace its origins to the late colonial indirect rule.

The local ownership principle is indeed coated in liberal idioms such as self-determination, sovereignty, participation, partnership, and cooperation (Chesterman, 2007, p. 20; Shinoda, 2015, p. 20; Von Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299). The EU, for instance, defines ownership in CSDP interventions as “the appropriation by the local authorities of the commonly agreed objectives and principles” (EU, 2005, p. 11). Metaphors that are used to depict ownership also have a strong liberal string attached. For example, peacebuilders often argue that “the locals should be in the driving seat” which implies liberal values of autonomy and self-rule (Suhrke, 2007, p. 1305). In addition to this, the language of “ownership,” “buy-ins,” and “demand-driven reforms” clearly reflects liberal economic discourse.

Still, the political rationality of the local ownership principle in international interventions is markedly different from that of domestic liberalism studied by Foucault. In contrast to liberalism at home, which emerged organically based on the political rationality of governed populations, local ownership in international interventions is based on the political rationality of interveners. Its origins, therefore, are not to be sought (or not only), as Shinoda (2015) suggests, “in the French Revolution and its ideal of national self-determination” (p. 20). The association of local ownership with sovereignty and self-determination is part of a settled policy narrative that naturalizes this principle as inherent to the liberal international order. My goal here is to disrupt this official script and genealogically trace the origins of the local ownership principle back to the colonial rule.

While the term itself is an early post-cold war invention, the logic of local ownership can be situated in a wider grid of political rationality of colonialism. Wilén (2009, p. 340), for instance, notes that the term ownership first appeared within the colonial administration discourse in the 1940s. I argue that the logic of ownership is reminiscent of the colonial principle of indirect rule which harks back further into the past. In some way, every imperial enterprise, especially when the control is weak and outposts are far from the metropolises, relies on some form of indirect rule through “allegiances with local powers” (Barkawi, 2011, p. 601). But from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the colonial rule shifted from what was predominantly direct to an indirect rule. The process was kick started with the Indian Mutiny in 1857, which revealed the limits of an ambition to Westernize India, the

consequence of which the colonial rule shifted “from rejuvenating to conserving society” (Mamdani, 1996, p. 49).

The indirect rule, as a model of governance perfected by the British in India, was later applied in the Equatorial Africa. Lord Frederick Lugard, one of the architects of British colonial rule in Africa, captures well the logic and the know-how of an indirect rule. For him, “the first step” of every indirect rule

is to endeavor to find a man of influence as chief, and to group under him as many villages or districts as possible, to teach him to delegate powers, and to take an interest in his “Native Treasury” to support his authority, and to inculcate a sense of responsibility. (Mamdani, 1996, p. 53)

The logic of indirect rule over the volatile post-imperial penumbra survived the end of colonialism. The old imperial system of indirect rule was superseded by a system in which former imperial subjects became governed through their own states. Indirect rule continued to operate, through international programs that “assist, advise, and constrain the conduct of postcolonial states” (Chatterjee, 2017, p. 88; Hindess, 2005, p. 409). This post-colonial evolution of indirect rule had a strong security aspect as well. Throughout the cold war, superpowers competed indirectly through local proxies to avoid the risks of a direct clash. Their missions of advice and support in the field of defense and security echoed the early periods of European colonialism when the metropolises controlled their colonial possessions indirectly through military assistance, persuasion and bargaining with native allies (Barkawi, 2011, p. 603).

The end of the cold war bloated ambitions of developed democracies that they can and have a duty to engineer liberal transformation of the world, echoing the colonial era idea of “mission civilisatrice” (Paris, 2002). Contemporary principle of ownership started to first emerge within the field of development in the 1990s as criticisms against structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank intensified (OECD, 1995; Richmond, 2012, p. 356). By the end of the 1990s, however, evidence was mounting that the Western model of governance is often not gaining local traction in weak states (Paris, 2004). This created a “crisis of confidence” in the liberal peace paradigm and made clear that without accommodating local customs, values, and leaders, international interventions could not achieve effective and sustainable results on the ground (Hameiri, Hughes, & Scarpello, 2017; p. 1; Lee & Özerdem, 2015, p. 1). The first steps in translating ownership into a principle of peacebuilding and statebuilding were made by international interveners in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1999 (Merdžanović, 2015, p. 228). Before long, ownership was endorsed by key actors involved in international interventions (Donais, 2012; Von Billerbeck, 2016) and by fragile and conflict-affected states (Nussbaum, Zorbas, & Koros, 2012).



Ownership also became one of the key principles underpinning all external policies of the EU including development, enlargement, neighborhood, conflict prevention, and crisis management (Ejdus, 2017, p. 5). Akin to other peacebuilders, the EU has justified the principle on pragmatic grounds, as an indispensable path to sustainability of reforms (EU, 2015a, p. 8; Interviews 12, 17, 80, and 88). In the words of one crisis management strategist from the European External Action Service (EEAS):

For me, it's not a principle that is important in and of itself, because it stems from sovereignty. I don't care about it. It's important because of its practical effects and because there is no sustainability without local ownership. (Interview 12)

In addition to this, the EU uses ownership to make its interventions more legitimate and immunize itself against the charges of neocolonialism (Chessterman, 2007, p. 9; Rayroux & Wilén, 2014, p. 26; Wilén, 2009, pp. 340–341). While scholars increasingly debate the echoes of empire in EU's external policies (Nicolaidis, Sèbe, & Maas, 2014) or even study the EU as a modern empire (Behr & Stivachtis, 2015; Zielonka, 2007), the EU is denying any continuities with the colonial past (Onar & Nicolaidis, 2013). As one EU crisis management planner put it: "Behind the local ownership principle there is a fear that the EU is going to be seen as a colonialist power. It gives the EU the shape of support rather than imposing" (Interview 11).

The governmental rationality of local ownership can be illustrated well in the case of EUCAP Nestor. To begin with, the mission was not launched in response to local needs but to protect the interests of the EU. After pirate attacks on the commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden peaked in 2008, thus incurring great costs for the European shipping industries and insurance companies, the EU was under strong pressure to do something (Interviews 33, 36, and 109). In December 2008, the EU deployed a naval counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia (EUNAVFOR Atalanta). However, it soon became increasingly clear that the root causes of piracy lied onshore so the EU launched EUCAP Nestor in July 2012 as an exit strategy of EUNAVFOR Atalanta (Interviews 36 and 81). These two missions were not deployed, as one EU diplomat put it, "because it makes us feel good or because it saves lives. We are doing it because it became too expensive to send ships through the Somali Basin and the Gulf of Aden and that's it" (Interview 109).

If the rationale of launching EUCAP Nestor was to protect EU's commercial and political interests in the Horn of Africa, the rationale of achieving ownership in this mission has been to turn host states into capable vehicles of reaching these strategic objectives. In other words, the effort of EUCAP Nestor to foster local ownership has not been driven by EU's attachment to sovereignty or self-determination of host nations. Instead, the EU has used

the language of sovereignty and self-determination to inculcate a sense of responsibility in local actors for counter-piracy tasks, and hence create a sustainable proxy solution to the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden (Interviews 80 and 96).

The problem with this approach was that it totally neglected the political rationalities of those who are on the receiving end of the intervention. Most importantly, none of the host states, except probably the Seychelles, saw piracy as their problem. Instead, they prioritized other maritime challenges such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, arms smuggling, human trafficking, and waste dumping (Interviews 74, 76, 77, and 98). In Somalia, most people perceive piracy as a legitimate reaction to illegal foreign fishing and international interventions as part of the same plot (Kerins, 2016). One Somali associate of EUCAP Nestor complains that the EU has been reluctant to offer the knowledge and capacities to Somalis to effectively patrol their waters:

It's a terribly dishonest system and one of the ways that system can work is that you have to keep Somalis away from protecting their waters ... This shows total reluctance to transfer to Somalis any form of substantial local ownership of maritime security even within their own territorial waters. (Interview 98)

Over time, however, the mission gradually adjusted to local realities. The mission de-scaled from the region which is not only enormous (half the size of the EU) but also mired in protracted conflict. It started focusing on Somalia only, where the problem of piracy originated, moved its headquarters from Djibouti to Mogadishu International Airport, and opened field offices in Hargeisa (Somaliland) and Garowe (Puntland). Moreover, its mandate broadened to include not only piracy, but also other maritime challenges, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and human or arms trafficking (EU, 2016). Nevertheless, the fundamental rationale of the intervention, which is to build local capacities for the fight against piracy, remains unchanged.

To sum up, in this section I have traced the origins of the local ownership principle back to the late colonial principle of indirect rule and analyzed its post-colonial evolution borne out of changing concerns of the West on how best to govern the rest. However, by no means have I suggested that the ownership principle is a neo-colonial continuation of an indirect rule aimed to extract resources of the former imperial domains. Today's peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions, although clearly driven by the concerns of strong northern states about insecurities in the global South, are nevertheless framed in the language of freedom and self-determination, both absent in the colonial times. In the next section, I turn to the analysis of how this combination of the (post)colonial mindset and liberal language shapes practical operationalization of ownership.

## Political technology of local ownership

Political technology is a material aspect of governmentality and “refers to the practices and devices through which political rationalities are operationalized and implemented in actual governance programmes and activities” (Merlingen, 2011a, p. 153). In this section, I show that ownership is not only a rhetoric that serves to legitimize interventions or shield interveners from charges of neocolonialism but a discourse that shapes intervention practices, although in a way that often constrains local agency.

The central technology of ownership in international interventions is *responsibilization*. The concept of responsibilization was not explicitly coined by Foucault but emerged within the larger field of governmentality studies (Biebricher, 2011; Löwenheim, 2007; Shamir, 2008). Biebricher (2011) defines it as a “technique that turns individuals into subjects that consider themselves as free and responsible for their own actions as well as the respective outcomes” (p. 471). Under neoliberalism, individuals are asked to take rational decisions as citizens and consumers but they are also called to bear the consequences for their own actions. Despite occasional resistance, domestic responsibilization in liberal societies “works,” as it effectively produces “free and responsible” subjects thus allowing the neoliberal logic to roll back the state.

In world politics, responsibilization also implies a process of producing states that can take care of themselves (Löwenheim, 2008). Responsibilization across borders, however, is not entirely analogous to domestic responsibilization within liberal societies. Domestic responsibilization implies an organic process that redefines relationships between citizens and their democratic states. International responsibilization is different in that it involves an attempt to impose a political rationality developed within one polity to shape behavior of another. Domestic responsibilization is directed toward populations so that the state can step back and society can self-regulate. In international responsibilization, states do not step back but rather remain to be in front and center of the process in which interveners try to responsibilize host states (through those who represent it or act on their behalf) for the implementation of objectives that are not of their own making.

In CSDP missions, the EU also operationalizes ownership as a responsibilization of host authorities so that they can implement externally designed objectives. It is used, as Merlingen (2011b) points out, “to socialise locals into their way of thinking and to persuade them to accept the proposed reforms as in their own best interest and thus to implement them effectively” (p. 205). The ownership principle allows the EU to keep the power of deciding about the objectives of interventions without having to bear the responsibility for their outcomes (Interview 43). The EU and its member states decide when, how, and to what end they will intervene. Locals, on the other hand, are

expected to internalize objectives of interventions. As one EUCAP Nestor member puts it, ownership “is a test to see whether the locals are ready to assume responsibility for this and if we are on the right track” (Interview 80).

Responsibilization in CSDP missions is implemented through a variety of techniques such as training, advising, mentoring, monitoring, capacity building, evaluation, benchmarking, peer-review, embedding, co-location, twinning, needs assessment, gap analysis, engaging local leaders, joint planning, and many others. In his analysis of the EU Police Mission in Bosnia, for example, Merlingen (2011a) shows how mentors mobilize the authority of their allegedly superior western knowledge to inculcate a sense of responsibility among the local professionals to narrow the gap (cf. İşleyen, 2017). Due to space constraints, I will here only discuss two exemplary techniques of local ownership to illustrate how responsabilization shapes everyday practices in EUCAP Nestor.

One responsabilization techniques in international interventions is engaging local leaders. According to OECD’s instructions on how to start the ownership process, which is strikingly similar to the previously quoted Lugar’s advice on the first steps of any indirect colonial rule,

The first step is to lay out a specific plan, with clear time lines and success indicators, that identifies the various local actors who will be involved in programme design and implementation, their roles and responsibilities, how they will be engaged, and what will be achieved through their engagement. (OECD, 2007, p. 64)

In CSDP missions, local leaders are engaged and responsabilized in different ways. One of the EU’s recommendations on local ownership based on the lessons learned exercise, for instance, was that “the EEAS should invite key political leaders of host countries to Brussels for face-to-face encounters with the [ambassadorial Political and Security Committee, PSC] to raise the profile of CSDP missions and to underline the importance of political accountability” (EU, 2015a, p. 9). To fulfill this recommendation, as one EU official explains, “the president of the Central African Republic came to Brussels, talked to the PSC, there were a number of high profile contacts, and we raised the profile of the mission, so we ticked the box there” (Interview 15). Member states’ delegates in the PSC sometimes visit host states and meet with local leaders. Counterparts that they meet, as one PSC delegate recalls, “tell you what you want to hear... that the mission should still be there because for them it’s a political signal that they can show that are willing to change, so the mission should be prolonged...” (Interview 36). Finally, to ensure the local buy-in, CSDP missions’ staff engages local leaders on a more regular basis through what is often referred to as “focal points,” “entry points,” and “key leader engagement” (KLE) on the ground.

In EUCAP Nestor, for example, the EU conducts KLE. The EU officials speak of the technique with the usual liberal language of consensus and mutually agreed objectives. As one EUCAP Nestor advisor explains, “the aim of KLEs is to have a common understanding and to share information about mutual projects, activities, and plans, but also to show our presence and commitment ...” (Interview 88). However, the technique was borrowed from counter-insurgency doctrines where it denotes “an area where commanders have an opportunity to change the behavior of those with the greatest influence over the population” (United Kingdom, 2009, pp. 6–7). It is therefore not designed in the first place to align the intervention to the needs of the locals, but primarily to align the local elites with the objectives of the intervention. This is how KLE is also perceived by the locals. They see KLEs as an attempt of the EU to impress the locals and secure their buy-in but also as a useful opportunity to communicate their needs and raise their personal or institutional profiles (Interviews 76, 84, and 91).

Another usual technique used to responsabilize the locals is joint planning. While in some cases the EU might operate only based on a resolution of the UN Security Council, EU decisions, and a formal invitation by host countries, most of the missions also conclude agreements regulating diplomatic status of missions (SOMA) and forces (SOFA). However, in some missions, to increase local ownership, the EU signs with host governments joint action plans (JAPs) and compact agreements. To oversee the implementation of these documents, the EU and host states then often establish joint monitoring and evaluation bodies. The policy rhetoric construes these instruments as tools for negotiating mutually agreed objectives and activities. In practice, however, the main objective of joint planning is often to inculcate in the locals a sense of ownership and responsibility for the implementation of objectives that are not of their own making.

Joint planning in EUCAP Nestor is an illustrative case in point. The mission agreed with the Government of Somaliland that the “overarching priority” was “to develop a common and agreed starting point for the desired Somaliland Coast Guard ‘Capability Target’” (Cooperation Agreement, 2014, p. 3). In the JAP, the two sides further “agreed” that the target achievement was the “Limited Initial Operational Capability” (LIOC) by the end of 2016 (EU, 2015c, p. 1). The JAP states that the process of achieving the LIOC was “demand driven” and that it follows a “bottom-up” approach which means that its objectives are “aligned with Somaliland’s Vision” and “National Development plans ...” (EU, 2014, p. 1). Based on this early “success,” the EUCAP Nestor Strategic Review from March 2015 even portrayed the JAP “as a model for the Missions future support to other Somali services involved in coastal and maritime law enforcement” (EU, 2015b, p. 12).

Despite this policy rhetoric, the EU was firmly in control of the entire process. The EU presented both the draft and the methodology to the locals and they were more than happy with that. As one EUCAP Nestor official recalls: “They were themselves not able to make additions, not only because of limitations in their command of English language but also due to their inability to master the intricacies of maritime security” (Interview 96). A representative of the Somaliland foreign ministry confirmed this: “In the process of drafting the JAP, EUCAP Nestor was in the driving seat. It was based on how they wanted to assist us. It was basically a plan of their activities” (Interview 95).

To increase the degree of local ownership over the JAP and its objectives, the mission started training and mentoring a group of young coast guard officers. Once the EU considered them ready, they were expected to take the responsibility to carry the coast guard capacity building forward (Interviews 96, 97, and 99). In addition to training, this group of young Somalilanders was given laptops and radios, with a view, as one former EUCAP Nestor staff member put it “to buy their loyalty and shape their ideas and mentality” (Interview 99).

In sum, as this section has shown, the principle of ownership is more than a mere rhetoric that only serves to legitimize interventions but a technology of international security governance that shapes intervention practices. However, as these practices are based on the rationality of interveners, instead of locals, they engender several forms of resistance to which the article turns next.

### **Local resistance to ownership**

The above-discussed governmental technology aims to shape the conduct of host states and societies by inculcating a sense of responsibility for externally designed objectives and ideas. In some cases, locals comply with international expectations or even invite imposition (Krogstad, 2014). Quite often, however, locals resist assuming ownership either by adapting liberal peace interventions and grafting them on the pre-existing structures or practices or openly contesting them. What results from this international/local interaction is inevitably some form of hybridity (Mac Ginty, 2010; Richmond, 2012; Wallis, 2012). The goal of this section is to empirically illustrate how previously described responsabilization techniques, because they are based on the rationality of interveners (instead of locals), often end up being perceived as imposed and as such resisted.

Resistance, or a “struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others” (Foucault, 2007, p. 201), can be either direct or indirect. While direct resistance is an open, and overt contestation that is followed by an equivalent public narrative, indirect resistance encompasses covert behavior

aimed at undermining international governmental efforts and which is usually underpinned by hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990). Direct resistance to ongoing international interventions by the official authorities is rather rare. Indirect resistance, on the other hand, is endemic, although it is also more difficult to detect it (Mac Ginty, 2010, p. 403). This *infrapolitics*, as Scott (1990, pp. 183–191) calls it, is not a substitute for open resistance but rather its condition, because the hidden transcript of resistance prepares the ground for the public, and more direct contestation.

Today virtually all international interventions take place only when there is a formal consent of host states. This means that before interventions can begin, host governments issue a formal invitation expressing their willingness to host an intervention on their territory. This is then followed by the signature of status of forces/mission agreements as well as other joint documents that were discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, just because host governments issued an invitation and signed an agreement does not mean that there is a genuine interest to implement interventions' objectives. Quite often, despite the invitation, host states resist in subtle and indirect ways to take ownership of interventions' objectives.

This is evident across CSDP interventions. In the EU, as one strategist pointed out, “many narrow down local ownership to the invitation of the partner country and their request for our support” and believe that ownership exists because reforms that the EU supports are based on national policies (Interview 12). The problem with this assumption is that locals often say yes to whatever is proposed by the EU as an important donor (Interviews 25, 72, 74, 81, 91, 96, and 99). As one EU diplomat puts it:

General African response to a delegation coming by with an offer of a mission would be “yes please come and we have a lots and lots things to do” and basically say yes to anything that is suggested in hope that whatever comes out will be us useful one way or another. (Interview 25)

Once the mission is launched, however, the same authorities that had previously issued the invitation often do not pull their weight in the implementation of objectives which were not of their own making (Kappler & Richmond, 2011; Rayroux & Wilén, 2014; Sahin, 2017; Vandemoortele, 2012).

The case of EUCAP Nestor provides a vivid illustration of both indirect and direct forms of resistance to the attempts of the EU to responsabilize the locals for externally devised mission objectives. According to the text of the EU's decision to launch EUCAP Nestor, for example, “The Governments of Djibouti, Kenya and the Seychelles, and the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) have welcomed the deployment of the Mission in their countries” (EU, 2012). However, the initial demand for the mission came from the EU, concerned for its interests undermined by piracy (and other threats such as migration and terrorism), and not from the host

states in the Horn of Africa (Interviews 32, 33, 36, 73, and 109). As a result, the mission had trouble acquiring even formal letters of invitation and SOMAs from all countries (Tejpar & Zetterlund, 2013, p. 22). The interest was particularly lukewarm in Kenya and Tanzania which did not see piracy as their problem at all (Tejpar & Zetterlund, 2013, pp. 19–22) and initially had unrealistic expectations that the mission will donate equipment like ships (Interviews 17, 32, and 42).

In Somalia, local authorities formally requested support from the EU and reiterated their declarations of commitment. Nevertheless, as pointed out by several mission members, this does not reflect real intentions as Somalis agree to everything that the EU suggests (Interviews 71, 74, 81, 91, and 96). This makes the EU, in the words of one mission member, “looking at the world through a colored set of lenses because people often tell you things that they think you want to hear” (Interview 96). One Somalilander agrees that “the locals usually accept whatever they are offered ... they want to please the internationals and keep them here not only because of the money and donations but because the government has very few international interlocutors” (Interview 72).

As the objectives of the mission are not of their own making, locals often exhibit various forms of indirect resistance to take ownership, especially when requested reforms impinge on their individual or group interests and/or interrupt established ways of doing things. This can be registered in private conversations in which locals often depict the nature of the relationship with the EU quite differently from the public transcript, according to which the EU and local authorities work toward mutually agreed objectives. For example, they often complain about the EU as an arrogant, self-interested, and over-bureaucratized organization spending most of its money on its own travel and security and on projects that are detached from local reality instead of supporting the essential needs of their local counterparts (Interviews 72, 78, 84, and 94). In the words of a senior advisor in the local coast guard: “The EU humiliates us. They disrespect us. They underestimate the knowledge of Somali experts ... when they come here they think that we are small” (Interview 78). Similarly, a Somali expert who works closely with the mission complains: “These guys believe that they are bringing the moon, but they are not doing anything. They are wasting a lot of money without any success because of some stupid rules that don’t work here” (Interview 94).

This widely shared hidden transcript is the condition that makes more practical forms of resistance possible. An illustrative example of an indirect resistance is the case of coast guard bills. The mission helped both the FGS and the Government of the Republic of Somaliland to draft their coast guard bills. The bills were drafted based on “the European best practice” and foresee Somali coast guards as relatively autonomous civilian bodies within ministries of interior. In its public rhetoric, the EU representatives



insist that they did not impose the bills and that the sovereign decision on how to structure their coast guards lies with the Somali authorities (Interview 89). In practice, however, the EU also made clear that the eventual decision to keep the coast guard as a military institution might hamper future support of the EU (Interview 17). One member of the coast guard recalls how EUCAP Mission members were saying: “if you sign this, it will be the key for funding ... nothing before you sign the law and it’s passed. Then all the funding of the EU will be open to you” (Interview 78). Despite the pressures, authorities in Somalia and Somaliland have been dragging their feet with ratification of the bills.

In February 2016, the indirect resistance transformed into a direct contestation, as the hidden transcript, depicted above, bursted into the official correspondence, at least for a brief instance. On February 29, the Ministry of Interior of Somaliland sent a harsh letter to EUCAP Nestor raising serious concerns about its work. Although the letter starts with the reiteration of the public transcript, that is, an expression of gratitude of the Government of Somaliland to the EU for the assistance offered by EUCAP Nestor, it then went on to make a long list of accusations, including for “imposing” agendas and views on the Coast Guard, “underestimating” the local knowledge and “lecturing ... rather than being a partner who is here to help the SLCG attain a certain degree of development” (Letter, 2016). As a result, the Head of Office was removed from post while the project of the LIOC came to a halt.

My intention here is neither to rob the locals of any strategic agency nor to romanticize their resistance in a narrative of “plucky locals standing up to nasty internationals” (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 212). Although the analysis of Somali interests and motivations goes beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that resistance to alien governmentality is always a defense of concrete interests and established ways of doing things. Thus, for example, many interlocutors point out that the reasons behind the delay in ratification of the coast guard bills are neither administrative backlog nor drought (as the official storyline goes). Instead, the bills are intentionally not passed as they could thwart plans of the Ministry of Defense to use the Coast Guard as a nucleus of the future navy (Interview 17), but also create unwanted police powers of the coast guard (Interview 95) and make it operationally autonomous from the Ministry of Interior (Interview 96). Mentoring of young officers in Somaliland, often in perceived violation of an established chain of command, did not go down well with the local authorities, especially the old guard who feared that the empowerment of the younger officers had the potential to leave them jobless in a country without a proper pension system (Interview 91).

Regardless of concrete motivations behind resistance, all these illustrations point out to the conclusion that as long as ownership is based on the alien rationality of interveners rather than the locals, it will be perceived as a

constraint on local autonomy. As such it is likely to be contested and ultimately resisted.

## Conclusion

Local ownership is a post-cold war idiom of international peacebuilding universally endorsed by policy makers. Despite high rhetoric, local ownership remains one of the weakest links in international interventions. In this article, by using the evidence from EUCAP Nestor, I have argued that the key reason why local ownership does not produce its intended outcomes lies in its political rationality. In contrast to domestic liberalism which is based on the rationality of the governed, local ownership as a principle of international interventions is based on the rationality of advanced democracies concerned how to govern insecurities beyond their borders in developing and conflict-affected states. Echoing the late colonial principle of indirect rule, local ownership hence emerged as the most reasoned way of governing the volatile peripheries of international society in the 2000s when the early post-cold war enthusiasm about the prospects for liberal peace started to falter.

Being driven by this post-colonial rationality, ownership is operationalized through techniques that aim to responsabilize but not necessarily to empower the locals. Ultimately, this alien governmentality gives rise to various forms of local resistance, both direct and indirect. Responsibilization across borders may produce some of the intended consequences in advanced liberal states. However, as we have clearly seen in the case of EUCAP Nestor, it has little or no effect in environments with limited statehood and few (if any) liberal institutions in place. Unfortunately, this is exactly the sort of environment where international crisis management interventions usually take place. That is why locals so frequently resist to assume ownership of international interventions.

This is an important insight because it sheds a novel light on the colonial origins of the local ownership principle, habitually deleted from the official register, its post-colonial evolution and the contemporary context in which it rose to a status of new orthodoxy in international interventions. Also, the analysis shows how the political rationality of powerful intervening states is translated through the technology of responsabilization into concrete techniques of security governance, why it is perceived as a constraint on local autonomy and likely to be resisted as such. My empirical focus on the little studied EU intervention in the Horn of Africa is also an addition to the more technical literature on CSDP.

Lastly, the article also brings to light a new set of empirical, normative, and theoretical puzzles. Empirically, future studies could expand the analysis to local ownership in other international interventions by the EU or other actors. It would be particularly interesting to compare how different

techniques of ownership as well as local resistance to them vary depending on the context. It would also be especially apposite to learn why fragile and conflict-affected states internalized the principle and how and to what practical effect they are using it to shape the course of international interventions. Normatively, the question remains whether the principle of ownership is salvageable or should we rather abandon it altogether due to its inherently problematic rationality. Theoretically, the article has not ventured into the question why peacebuilders continue justifying local ownership on pragmatic grounds despite the overwhelming record of implementation problems. Is there something deeply “irrational” about the local ownership principle or, imperfect as it is, it still fulfills some deeper, ontological needs of international peace and state-builders? If yes, what are they?

## Note

1. Interviewees were identified through a snowballing technique and included EU policy architects in Brussels and its operational personnel on the ground, local government, and security sector representatives, as well as relevant civil society representatives. All interviews were semi-structured, anonymous, confidential, and lasted on average between 60 and 90 min.

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