**Why locals can’t own international interventions: evidence from CSDP missions**

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In recent years, there has been a fundamental shift in discourse of international interventions as locals are increasingly expected to assume ownership. The EU has also endorsed local ownership as one of the core principles of its peacebuilding interventions. While the existing studies have shown that achieving ownership in practice has been one of the most difficult challenges facing international peacebuilders, we still don’t fully understand why these problems persist. Drawing on Governmentality Studies and reflecting on 116 interviews with decision-makers involved in Common Security and Defense (CSDP) missions, I argue that locals don’t assume ownership because of three inter-connected reasons. First, the principle of ownership is based on the political rationality of interveners instead of locals. Consequently, ownership is operationalized as responsibilization for externally designed objectives. Finally, this gives rise to local resistance that ultimately undermine international efforts to achieve local ownership. I illustrate my arguments with examples from the Regional Maritime Capacity Building Mission in the Horn of Africa (EUCAP Nestor).

Keywords: local ownership, peacebuilding, interventions, governmentality, CSDP.

Among countless IR neologisms that have mushroomed in the post-Cold War period, local ownership has a pride of place. Since the turn of the century, it has become one of the guiding principles of international support to peace and security. The core idea of local ownership is that international involvement in peacebuilding is only viable if it relies on local leadership and indigenous capacities. Virtually all international organizations as well as major aid agencies, think thanks and NGOs involved in international support to peace and security went on to adopt the principle of ownership as “the gold standard of successful peace and statebuilding” (Dursun-Ozkanca and Crossley-Frolick, 2012, p. 251). The EU has been at the forefront of this trend by endorsing ownership across its external policies and even declaring it to be a principle “inherent to European approach to international relations” (EU, 2008, p. 3).

Vast majority of studies, however, have documented serious challenges in the implementation of ownership. The UN, which pioneered the concept failed to match its rhetoric on ownership with its peacebuilding practice (Billerbeck, 2016, p. 4). The EU, has also struggled to live to this principle, especially in its CSDP interventions (Ginsberg and Penksa, 2012, p. 112-113). Operationalizing local ownership in practice turned out to be, as Mark Downes and Rory Keane rightly remarked, “one of the most complex challenges” facing international assistance to peace and security (Keane and Downes, 2012, p. 2). Even scholars who champion liberal peacebuilding such as Roland Paris admit that “insufficient local ownership” is one of its key challenges (Paris, 2010, p. 347). As a result, some scholars criticize local ownership as a legitimizing concept (Wilén, 2009) and a rhetorical cover (Chandler 2011, p. 20) although many still hold that the concept should be retained as an important ideal of peacebuilding (Donais 2012, p. 140; Bendix and Stanley, 2008, p. 102).

Why locals can’t own international interventions? Some scholars blame international peacebuilders and their focus on stability (Billerbeck, 2015, 2016), imposition of Western norms (Oosterveld and Galand, 2012, p. 167), lack of contextual knowledge (Sending, 2009), foreign ways of thinking (Autesserre, 2014, p. 98), or poor coordination (Mackenzie-Smith, 2015). Others posit that the key obstacles to ownership are domestic insecurity (Scheye and Peake, 2008), weak local capacities (Chesterman, 2007), lack of consensus among locals (Thiessen, 2013, 2016), absence of political will among domestic elites (Gordon, 2014 p. 128), or even their preference for external imposition (Krogstad, 2014). However, we still don’t fully understand how international and local agencies are connected in preventing higher degrees of local ownership.

To fill this gap, in this article I draw on Governmentality Studies and 116 interviews with decision-makers involved in civilian CSDP missions.[[1]](#footnote-1) My main argument is that insufficient local ownership is so common in international interventions for three interlinked reasons. To begin with, the principle of ownership is based on the political rationality of interveners instead of locals. Consequently, ownership is operationalized as a responsibilization of locals for externally designed objectives. Finally, this distant governmentality gives rise to local resistance that ultimately undermines international efforts to achieve local ownership. I illustrate my arguments with the evidence from EUCAP Nestor which has been struggling to achieve local ownership since it was launched in 2012 (Tejpar and Zetterlund, 2013; House of Commons 2015, p. 89).[[2]](#footnote-2)

The article proceeds in the following order: in the first section I briefly discuss how local ownership has been analyzed within Governmentality Studies 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**

The term governmentality was first coined by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2007 p. 108). In the broadest possible sense, governmentality is used to denote any historic form of rationality of rule. In the narrower sense, governmentality means an ensemble of liberal discourses and practices aimed to govern indirectly, beyond the immediate reach of the state. While sovereignty and discipline are forms of direct power that rest on the rationality of the ruler, governmentality is a liberal form of power that is exercised indirectly and which is based not on the rationality of the state, or *raison d’état*, but on the rationality of the governed, populations and societies (Foucault, 2008 p. 312).

Foucault’s ideas on governmentality inspired a wider field of Governmentality Studies (Osborne, Rose, and Barry, 1996). In recent years, the field of IR has experienced a veritable “Foucauldian turn” of its own (Kiersey and Stokes, 2013, p. xvi). While none of these works look at the local ownership principle in a systematic manner, many of them characterize the local ownership principle as a quintessentially liberal form of governmentality. Neumann and Sending, for example, hold that the local ownership principle reflects liberal transformation of world politics (Neumann and Sending, 2010, p. 144). Similarly, Jacqueline Best contends that “the emerging discourse of ownership […] feeds into a conception of self-responsibility that greatly resembles a Foucauldian logic of self-government” (Best, 2007, p. 96). For Milja Kurki, this is more than a mere resemblance. In her analysis of EU democracy promotion, she writes that “the key aspect of neoliberal governance […] is the emphasis on the local ownership of the processes of decision making” (Kurki, 2011, p. 353).

These analyses reveal fascinating similarities between domestic liberalism, which evolved over the centuries, and the recent local ownership principle in international interventions. Developed democracies indeed seek legitimacy for their interventions by cloaking them in the liberal language of ownership, freedom and participation (Wilén, 2009). However, there is more to local ownership than mere policy statements. Local ownership also produces a specific form of knowledge, structures practices and constitutes sites of intervention in a way that might vaguely resemble domestic liberalism, but is also reminiscent of colonial and disciplinary practices. To take the liberal policy idioms for granted means not only to accept security policies of powerful Western states at face value but also to inadvertently reinforce the hegemonic liberal account of world politics. As Selby aptly points out, when “scaled up to inform analyses of the current world order, Foucault’s work becomes less an interrogation of liberalism than a prop to reworked liberal accounts of the international arena” (Selby, 2007, p. 326).

Consequently, some authors have characterized local ownership as an essentially illiberal practice. Oliver Richmond, for example argues that local ownership is “illiberal, distant governmentality which is likely to be resisted because it undermines political autonomy, legitimacy and identity” (Richmond, 2012, p. 371). Richmond holds that this resistance nevertheless holds a “potential for a postcolonial form of peace […]” (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, p. 6). Chandler is less optimistic and argues that ownership is an unsalvageable governmental technology of postliberalism, to which the West regressed after the failure of early post-Cold War experiment to export its modes of political and economic governance (Chandler, 2006, Chandler, 2010; Chandler and Richmond, 2015). Although Richmond and Chandler offer a valid critique of the dominant understanding of local ownership created within the hegemonic liberal policy discourse, they stop short of providing a systematic analysis of local ownership, as a form of international governmentality which is the goal of this article.

To that end, I first analyze the political rationality of local ownership, or the way it is reasoned. Then I discuss the political technology of local ownership which refers to the way this principle is operationalized. Finally, I examine different forms of local resistance to ownership. My key argument is that although the local ownership is narrated in liberal idioms, it is based on the political rationality of interveners instead of locals. Consequently, ownership is operationalized as a supply-driven responsibilization of locals without necessarily empowering them. This gives rise to various forms of local resistance that ultimately undermine international efforts to achieve local ownership. Empirical evidence used as an illustration draws on 116 semi-structured interviews conducted with EU policy-makers involved in planning, conducting and implementing CSDP missions (particularly EUCAP Nestor) as well as their local counterparts in host states and societies.

**The 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. This liberal political rationality, Foucault holds, gradually gained pre-eminence over other direct forms of power such as discipline and sovereignty (Foucault, 2007, pp. 108-109). While sovereignty and discipline are forms of direct power that rest on the rationality of the ruler, liberal governmentality is a form of power that is exercised indirectly. Most importantly, it is not based on the rationality of the state, or raison d’état, but on the rationality of the governed population. For Foucault, the advent of liberalism implies a shift from the rationality of a sovereign to the rationality of the governed. “This”, he writes, “is what characterises 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 behaviour of those who are governed” (Foucault, 2008, p. 312).

Each political rationality can be studied in terms of its language, genealogy, normativity and knowledge (Vucetic, 2011; Merlingen 2011a; Rose and Miller, 1992). The local ownership principle is indeed coated in liberal idioms such as self-determination, sovereignty, participation, partnership and cooperation (Cheseterman, 2007, p. 20; Shinoda, 2015 p. 20; Saul, 2011, p. 166; Billerbeck, 2015, p. 299). The EU Council, 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. In addition to this, by framing international peacebuilding as a consensual exchange based on international supply and local demand, the language of “ownership”, “buy in” and “demand-driven reforms”, clearly refers to notions of economic liberalism.

However, the political rationality of the local ownership principle in peacebuilding is markedly different from the political rationality of domestic liberalism studied by Foucault. In contrast to liberalism at home, which emerged organically on the basis of the political rationality of governed populations, local ownership in peacebuilding is based on the political rationality of interveners and externally imposed. Its origins are, therefore, not to be sought (or not only) “in the French Revolution and its ideal of national self-determination, later elevated into the status of the core principle of international law through the spread of nationalism in the 19th and de-colonization in the 20th century” (Shinoda, 2015, 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.

The term itself, as Nina Wilén has noticed, first appeared within the colonial administration discourse in the 1940s (Wilén, 2009, p. 340). However, at the time, the term referred to property of land by indigenous people and had little to do with the metaphorical meaning it acquired in the late 1990s (Greaves, 1954, p. 6). Moreover, the focus on the term itself captures only a tip of the iceberg. My intention is to use this lead but go beyond and situate the principle of local ownership in a wider grid of political rationality of indirect colonial rule, which harks back further into the past. Indirect rule can be defined as “a form of political control in which agents of the state delegate day-to-day governance to local power-holders in areas considered beyond the reach of the state’s direct authority” (Naseemullah and Staniland, 2016, p. 14). In some way, every imperial enterprise, especially when the control is weak and outposts are far from the metropole, relies on some form of indirect rule through “allegiances with local powers” (Barkawi, 2011, p. 601).

From the mid-19th century onwards, however, the colonial rule started a shift from what was predominantly direct to an indirect rule. The process was kickstarted with the Indian Mutiny in 1857 which showcased the failures of colonial power 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 soon applied in the Equatorial Africa, and copied by smaller colonial powers too. The logic of an indirect rule was best captured by Lord Frederick Lugard, British colonial administrator and one of the colonial architects in Africa. 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 continued well after decolonization. The old imperial system of indirect rule, as Barry Hindess remarks, “has been superseded by a less direct system in which the inhabitants of the old imperial domains are governed through sovereign states of their own […]” (Hindess, 2005, p. 409). During 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, for example, as Barkawi writes, “echoed the early period of European expansion and that of military assistance to native allies, in which the Europeans could not exercise direct control but had to rely more on persuasion and bargaining with local elites” (Barkawi, 2011, p. 603).

The end of bipolarity brought about a sea change in the world order. Emboldened by their victory over the Soviet Union and world communism, developed democracies embarked on yet another civilizing mission to shape the developing world in their own image (Paris, 2002). When the limitations of these endeavors started to emerge, and particularly since 9/11, the Western interventions have been increasingly framed as actions driven by self-interests rather than by the welfare of others (Long, 2006, p. 213). One graphic example of this discursive shift is a stark contrast between the earlier EU crisis management interventions that aimed to build liberal states in Bosnia and Kosovo, and more recent training missions in Africa and Middle East with the primary goal to counter local or regional insurgencies by proxy (Olsen, 2014; Turner, 2015).

Like in the field of development in the early 1990s, the local ownership principle was introduced in the field of peacebuilding in the early 2000s for pragmatic reasons.[[3]](#footnote-3) In particular, the local ownership principle is routinely justified in policy statements as the best way to sustainability. This causal assumption was made in the seminal OECD document that pioneered the concept of ownership (OECD, 1995, p. 1) and has been reiterated in virtually every peacebuilding policy statement ever since. Usually off the record, peacebuilders often add another pragmatic justification for ownership as it helps them avoid the charge of neo-colonialism (Chesterman, 2007, p. 9; Wilén, 2009 p. 341). 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).

Since the turn of the century, ownership has become one of the key principles underpinning all external policies of the EU including development (EU, 2006b), enlargement (EU, 2002, p. 101), neighborhood (EU, 2015b, p. 2), conflict prevention (EU 2001, p. 10), and crisis management (EU, 2005; EU, 2006a; EU, 2016c). Akin to other peacebuilders, the EU has justified the principle on pragmatic grounds as “ownership and support by the host country is necessary if the mission is to be truly successful and sustainable” (EU, 2015a, p. 8). In the words of an official from the European External Action Service (EEAS) who participated in drafting key strategic documents in the field of crisis management: “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. So, local ownership is not a moral or ethical issue but a practical one” (Interview 12).

Finally, the political rationality of local ownership can also be understood in terms of specific knowledge claims made by international interveners to make sense of the local field of governance (Rose and Miller, 1992, p. 179; Merlingen, 2011a, p. 152). Even though the rhetoric of ownership aims to “put the locals in the driving seat” the principle is nevertheless constitutive of a colonialist binary representation of the world (Doty, 1996). The international invariably denotes the core group of developed democracies, or in the case of CSDP interventions the EU member states, where the rules of liberalism prevail. The local, on the other hand, doesn’t denote a certain micro level of analysis because if it did it would encompass any local agency including EU’s. Instead, it denotes underdeveloped, conflict-affected and politically fragile states and societies who are at the receiving end of interventions. The local is therefore construed, not as passive but as stuck and incapable of moving forward and whose agency can only be “liberated” from the outside.

The ownership principle does emphasize the importance of the local knowledge for sustainability of interventions. Thus, for example, the OECD acknowledges that “the superior knowledge that national partners have of the country context should be recognized” (OECD, 2007, p. 58). This emphasis on the contextual knowledge, however doesn’t destabilize a wider epistemological hierarchy of liberal peacebuilding in which interventions are designed according to universal knowledge on how to construct liberal states or build liberal peace while the contextual knowledge serves a subordinate role of easing the implementation. As a result, functional experts have by default a privileged role over area experts in peacebuilding interventions (Sending, 2009) while organizational knowledge usually flows from the center to the periphery (De Coning, 2013).

In CSDP interventions too, virtually all seconded and contracted personnel are functional experts, such as maritime advisors, prosecutors or policemen, while area experts are rarely recruited and usually for auxiliary roles. Moreover, in the words of an EU official from the European Security and Defense College, pre-deployment trainings usualy contain a cursory element on the local context. In most part, they “are quite generic. They hammer down the principles, EU views and what do we mean by Security Sector Reforms” (Interview 19). Once deployed, staff members need a lot of time to familiarize with their local environments. As one Somali who works with EUCAP Nestor put it: “By the time they get the local context, they have to leave the mission.” (Interview 90). Therefore, in the words of another Somali who worked closely with the mission, “it’s better to have an idiot who understands how the local society works than to send people with three degrees in astrophysics who don’t know the local context.” (Interview 84).

To sum up, despite the liberal language used to articulate local ownership, the political rationality behind it, with roots in the late colonial indirect rule, is driven by pragmatic concern of the West on how best to govern the rest. To interpret the local ownership as an instance of the global spread of liberal norms only perpetuates the liberal smokescreen that conceals not only the colonial origins of the principle but also the continued power asymmetry it’s constitutive of. In the next section I analyze the ramifications of such a political rationality of local ownership on the way it is operationalized and implemented in practice.

**The political technology of local ownership**

Political technology is a material aspect of every 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 the central technology of local ownership is *responsibilization*. The concept of responsibilization was not explicitly coined by Foucault but emerged within the larger field of Governmentality Studies (Barry et. al, 1996; Biebricher, 2011; Shamir 2008). Biebricher 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” (Biebricher, 2011, p. 471). In liberal societies, individuals are responsibilized as customers, employees or credit-card users (among other) and called to bear the consequences for their own actions. As they thus become responsibilized to make their own decisions, they are also left without the protection of their increasingly scaled-back states.

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 states in a democratic polity. International responsibilization is different in that it involves an attempt to impose a political rationality developed within one polity to shape the behavior of another. Domestic responsibilization is directed towards populations so that the state can step back and society can self-regulate. In international responsibilization, states don’t step back. On the contrary, they are at the center stage of the process, as advanced western states try to responsibilize host states for the implementation of objectives that are not of their own making. Responsibilization across borders, therefore, “reproduces structures of authority and hierarchy in the international system” (Löwenheim, 2008, p. 255).

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. Responsibilization across borders, is far less successful in producing the desired outcomes especially when targeting conflict-affected states with little or no resemblance to liberal democracies. In these cases, the attempt to govern through freedom often becomes a liberogenic practice that ends up curtailing autonomy of those who are supposed to be liberated (cf. Foucault, 2008, p. 69). The attempt to govern such states through freedom resembles, as Joseph puts it, “what Foucauldians would call ‘disciplinary power’ rather than fully fledged liberal governmentality” (Joseph, 2010, p. 225). Usually during interventions, more coercive and disciplinary models of external security governance gradually make space for less direct mechanisms of responsibilization such as persuasion and socialization (Schroeder et al, 2013). However, even if disciplinary elements fade into the background, host states continue to be aware that the possibility of their reactivation remains. In most extreme situations, when host states fail to act in a “responsible” manner they know well that they might have their “sovereignty licenses revoked by the international community” (Neumann and Sending, 2010, p. 177).

In CSDP missions, the EU routinely operationalizes local ownership as a responsibilization of locals so that they can implement externally designed objectives. As Merlingen points out, CSDP missions operationalize local ownership as a management tool employed “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” (Merlingen, 2011b, p. 205). The local 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 to what end they will intervene. Locals, on the other hand, are expected to internalize objectives of interventions, so that implementation is succesful and its results sustainable.

In CSDP missions, the political technology of responsibilization is implemented through techniques such as monitoring, evaluation, benchmarking, peer-review, training, mentoring, advising, embedding, co-location, twinning, capacity building, needs assessment, gap analysis, key leader engagement, joint planning and programming etc. Very often, these techniques overlap each other and have variable names. Some of these techniques, have already been studied by governmentality scholars before. In his analysis of EUPM in Bosnia, for example, Michael Merlingen shows how mentoring starts with a near-permanent surveillance to establish a gap between the local routines and EU best practices. Then the mentors mobilize the authority of their allegedly superior western knowledge to inculcate a sense of responsibility among the local professionals to narrow the gap. Merlingen concludes that “the productive power of a seemingly innocuous technique such as mentoring will often have a more far-reaching and lasting impact on the local security sector than traditional command powers” (Merlingen, 2011a, p. 161). Due to space constraints, I will here only discuss three exemplary techniques to illustrate how the political technology of responsibilization, driven by the political rationality of interveners, shapes everyday practices in international interventions.

The first one is *needs assessment*. Every CSDP mission is preceded by fact-finding and technical assessment missions. Needs assessment starts here and continues throughout the lifecycle of the mission. However, both fact-finding and technical assessment missions are often short and cursory exercises that only consider views of the top governmental echelons in host states. Consequently, they struggle to take on board the views of a wider administration, which is usually the target of CSDP interventions. Sentiments of wider segments of society vis-à-vis the proposed mission, who are supposed to be its end-users, are routinely ignored. As missions mature, the level of understanding of the local needs grows. It often turns out that the local needs are quite different from what CSDP missions were initially mandated to achieve. As a result, the EU adapts without abandoning the strategic rationale of the mission, still grounded in the political rationality of the intervener. Instead, it tries to recalibrate its approach and transform the local needs into a vehicle of fulfilling the mission mandate and protecting EU interests.

EUCAP Nestor is a good case in point. It was launched in July 2012, with the aim of assisting states in the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean to build their counter-piracy capacities.[[4]](#footnote-4) It took the EU five years to realize that countering piracy is not something that keeps the countries of the Horn of Africa awake at night. The EU, therefore, decided to phase the mission out of the region and focus on Somalia only, where the problem of piracy originated. More importantly, the mission has broadened its hitherto exclusive focus on piracy to also cover issues such as illegal fishing, arms smuggling, human trafficking and illegal waste dumping (Interviews 74). As one member state delegate in the Political Security Committee (PSC) put it, now after so many years the EU:

talk(s) to the Somalis about these maritime security issues that are relevant for them, how can we build a legal framework that will allow them to make permits for fishing and make money out of it and how we help them enforce these laws and legislation so that as they do that, they also take away the space for the pirates (Interview 25).

The second technique of responsibilization that I will use as an example in this article is *engaging local leaders*. There is a striking similarity between previously quoted Lugar’s advice on the first steps of any indirect rule and OECD’s instructions on how to begin seeking for the local buy-in:

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 the context of CSDP missions, local leaders are engaged at various levels of authority and in a multiplicity of sites. 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 PSC to raise the profile of CSDP missions and to underline the importance of political accountability” (EU, 2015a, p. 9). To fulfil this recommendation, as one EU official explains, “the president of CAR 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). With the same goal in mind, member states’ delegates in the PSC sometimes visit host states and meet with key local leaders. Counterparts that they meet, as one PSC delegate put it “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 and that they will work, blah, blah, blah” (Interview 36).

To ensure the local buy-in, CSDP missions staff engage local leaders on a more regular basis. In Somalia for example, EUCAP Nestor calls this “key leader engagement” (KLE). The term 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” (UK, 2009, p.6-7). On several occasions, for example, KLEs took place on board of ships deployed off the coast of Somalia as part of EUNAVFOR Atalanta. 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). Local counterparts, on the other hand, see KLEs as an attempt of the EU to impress the locals but also as a useful opportunity to communicate their needs and raise their personal or institutional profiles (Interview 76, 91).

Another usual technique used to responsibilize the locals to take ownership is *joint planning and programming*. While in some cases the EU might operate only based on a Resolution of the UN Security Council, an EU Council decision and a formal invitation by host countries, most of the missions also conclude agreements regulating diplomatic status of missions (SOMA) and operations (SOFA) (DCAF, 2016, p. 13). However, in some missions, the EU takes a step further in its efforts to responsibilize locals and signs Joint Action Plans and Compact Agreements with host governments. 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, joint planning and programming serve to further socialize locals into the governance networks to responsibilize them for the implementation of externally devised objectives.

The way joint planning and programming functioned in EUCAP Nestor is an illustrative case in point. Its “overarching priority” was “to develop a common and agreed starting point for the desired Somaliland Coast Guard ‘Capability Target” (Cooperation Agreement, 2014, p. 3). The target the achievement of the “Limited Initial Operational Capability” by the end of 2016 as set out in the Tripartite Joint Action Plan Somaliland (2014-2016) (JAP) between the Republic of Somaliland, EUCAP Nestor and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) (EU, 2014, p. 1). The JAP, states that the process is “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 […]” (Ibid). According to a Strategic Review from March 2015, the JAP was portrayed “as a model for the Missions future support to other Somali services involved in coastal and maritime law enforcement” (EU, 2015c, p. 12).

Despite these rhetorical commitments, 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). This was confirmed by a representative of the Somaliland MFA. He said that “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).

Joint planning was closely intertwined with other techniques of responsibilization such as mentoring, training, advising but also technical support. For example, 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 they were considered ready by the EU, they were expected to take the responsibility to carry the Coast Guard capacity building forward (Interview 96). In addition to training, this group of young Somalilanders were 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).

Another example when technical support was used to inculcate a sense of responsibility for externally designed objectives is the official website of the Somaliland Coast Guard which was developed by EUCAP Nestor. There, one can read the Vision Statement of the Coast Guard which lays out a strategic transformation plan that should result in the achievement of the “Limited Initial Operational Capability (IOC) not later than the end of 2016”.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, in the words of one member of the Coast Guard “the information on the website about this IOC project is fake” (Interview 78). From EUCAP Nestor point of view, it’s the responsibility of the locals. “We don’t own the website” one mission member clarifies, “[t]hat was given to the Somali Coast Guard and they can do whatever they want with it” (Interview 74).

So far, I have demonstrated than 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. In particular, I have argued that the local ownership principle is operationalized through the political technology of responsibilization. As it has been shown in the context of CSDP missions and illustrated with examples from EUCAP Nestor, the technology of responsibilization is further implemented through a variety of techniques all aimed to govern insecurities in conflict-affected areas at a distance and through local proxies. 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.

**Resistance to local ownership**

The above-discussed governmental technology and techniques aim to shape the conduct of host states and societies by inculcating a sense of responsibility for externally designed objectives and ideas. However, as Foucault pointed out, every attempt to direct the conduct of others, always generates resistance or “the struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others” (Foucault, 2007, p. 201). Resistance, as we know, is a contested notion and can take many different forms (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). For this article, I will draw on James C. Scott to distinguish public and hidden resistance (Scott 1990). While the public resistance is direct, open and overt contestation, the hidden resistance encompasses indirect, hidden and covert behavior aimed at undermining governmental efforts. In the rest of this section I show that attempts to increase the degree of local ownership, because they are driven by the political rationality of interveners, engender various forms of local resistance that ultimately hinder ownership.

In theory, most contemporary international interventions take place with a formal consent of host states. This means that before interventions can begin, host governments should 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 the host government issued an invitation and signed an agreement or formally backed a joint plan doesn’t mean that there is a genuine interest to implement interventions’ objectives. Quite often, despite the declarations of commitment to the objectives of interventions issued by the local authorities, members of the local administration resist to take ownership. Local population, if aware of the intervention at all, is often either indifferet or critical of it.

This is evident across CSDP missions. 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 and make national policy documents only to please donors. As one PSC delegate put 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, the very local authorities who issued the invitation often don’t pull their weight in the implementation of objectives which were not of their own making. CSDP missions are usually too small and technical to matter for larger populations. However, in some cases such as EULEX Kosovo, the local population has a very low trust in the mission, while the Serb population in the North is openly hostile to it (Papadrimitriou and Petrov, 2012).

The case of EUCAP Nestor provides a vivid illustration of various forms of local resistance. According to the EU council 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, it is well known that the initial demand for the mission came from the EU, concerned for its trade interests undermined by piracy, and not from the host states in the Horn of Africa (Interview 32). Moreover, since the very outset the mission had a trouble of acquiring even formal letters of invitations and SOMAs from all countries (Tejpar and Zetterlund 2013, p. 22). The interest was particularly lukewarm in Kenya and Tanzania which didn’t see piracy as their problem at all (Ibid, 19, 22) and initially had unrealistic expectations that the mission will donate equipment like ships (Interview 32).

In Somalia, where the mission has focused its attention since 2015, the situation has been even more complicated. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) invited the EU to deploy in Mogadishu (Ibid, p.21). This was legally covered by the SOFA previously signed for the operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta which was then extended to also cover EUCAP Nestor (Interview 33). The government of Somaliland, which is a self-declared and unrecognized state covering North West Somalia, exchanged letters with the EU and signed a Cooperation Agreement that regulates the status of mission issues (Interview 95). In the Agreement, Somaliland expressed “that it wishes to receive assistance from EUCAP Nestor for the benefit of enhancing maritime security” (Cooperation Agreement, 2014, p.1).

The formal request and subsequent agreements haven’t necessarily expressed a genuine interest and determination by Somali counterparts to assume ownership of mission objectives. Several mission members complained that Somalis agree to everything that the EU suggest (Interviews 71, 84, 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. That is partly linked to the local culture” (Interview 96). Interestingly, several local interlocutors have also confirmed this. One of them says that “the locals usually accept whatever they are offered. They don’t even know what they need. 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). Similarly, one Somali who used to work for the mission confirms that “Somali Ministers and everybody else at the highest level will always say ‘yes, yes, yes’ to such documents. They are not really interested to contribute much to this kind of documents” (Interview 99).

In practice, the locals exhibited various forms of low-profile, indirect resistance to the objectives sought by EUCAP Nestor. One illustrative example is the case of coast guard bills. The mission helped both the FGS and the Government of the Republic of Somaliland to draft their respective coast guard bills, and this task was completed in 2014. Both bills draw on the European best practices which construe Somali coast guards as relatively autonomous civilian bodies that belong to their respective ministries of interior. In the public rhetoric, the EU insists that it doesn’t impose anything and that the sovereign decision lies with the Somali authorities. In the words of one mission member: “We need Somalis themselves to take responsibility”, adopt the law and decide “which direction they want to take with the Coast Guard and maritime security more generally” (Interview 89). In practice, the EU also made clear to the FGS that its 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 recollects 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, both authorities in Somalia and Somaliland have been foot dragging with respect to ratification. The reason behind the delay in Mogadishu is primarily the fact that many people in their Ministry of Defense want to keep the control over the future Coast Guard as a nucleus of their navy (Interview 17). In their view this might have strategic relevance but it also stems from nostalgia for the times when their country had a formidable Navy under the regime of Siad Barre. For example, on senior Coast Guard advisor recalls the times with the following words: “We were the strongest Navy in black Africa” (Interview, 78). Somaliland authorities have been also delaying the adoption of the bill on the Somaliland Coast Guard (now part of the Ministry of Interior), although seemingly for different reasons.[[6]](#footnote-6) Members of the Coast Guard (Interviews 75, 76, 78, 79, 87) deplore the fact that the bill hasn’t been adopted for such a long time as it would legalize their status and significantly strengthen their mandate with police like powers to arrest, detain, question and interrogate subjects, collect evidence and take statements from them (Coast Guard Bill, 8). The official storyline behind the delay is that the Ministry of Interior has other priorities while Somaliland’s Parliament is seriously backlogged. The real reason behind this lack of determination, however, seems to be the fact that the locals’ expectations of material benefits of EUCAP Nestor have never been fully materialized (Interview 78) but also due to concerns about the police powers of the Coast Guard (Interview 95) and its operational autonomy from the Ministry of Interior (Interview 96).

In addition to the foot dragging with the ratification of the coast guard bills, the locals have resisted the EU’s attempts to responsibilize them in several other indirect ways. For example, Coast Guard members attend the meetings and listen to the advice offered by EUCAP Nestor, but often with little interest to follow through with action. An EUCAP Nestor member reccals one of the meetings where the local officers were advised on how to restructure the Coast Guard: “Those guys were not even listening […] you have to understand the mentality [...] you should not bring here how the Coast Guard works in Europe” (Interview 94). This is how another local participant described a lecture by EUCAP Nestor to the Coast Guard leadership on how the new command structure should look like: “The locals were only listening and didn’t ask a single question. Most of them spoke extremely poor English (Interview 91). At the end of the meeting, “they promised that they will take a look […] but they never implemented the structure” (Ibid).

In February 2016, the local contestation became direct. On February 29, the Ministry of Interior sent a very harsh official letter to EUCAP Nestor raising serious concerns about its work in Somaliland. Although the letter starts with an expression of gratitude to the assistance offered by EUCAP Nestor, it then goes 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). What exactly prompted this outburst of open resistance remains debatable. Some interlocutors argue that mentoring of young officers, sometimes in violation of an established chain of command, didn’t go down well with the local authorities. Especially concerned seem to be the old guard who feared that the empowerment of the younger officers had the potential to side-line them and even leave them jobless in a country without a proper pension system (Interview 91). Other interlocutors argue that that the true reasons behind the letter was a rising concern that the Coast Guard, empowered by the EU, might encroach on illicit activities in the port of Berbera, seemingly linked to the president Silanyo. Be that as it may, the consequence of this the letter was the removal of the Head of Office while the project of the Limited Initial Operational Capability came to a halt (Interview 96).

**Conclusion**

Local ownership is a post-Cold War idiom of international peacebuilding universally endorsed by policy makers. Despite rhetorical attachment to the principle and significant efforts invested in its implementation, local ownership remains one of the weakest links in international peacebuilding. In this article, I have argued that the key reason why local ownership doesn’t work lies in its political rationality. Despite the liberal language in which the principle is cloaked, local ownership is based on the rationality of intervenors, not locals. It was historically borne out of the late colonial disillusionment with the prospect of westernization of the colonies and increasing reliance on indigenous traditions and local proxies. It was revamped as the most reasoned way of governing the volatile peripheries of global order in the early 2000s when the early post-Cold War enthusiasm about the prospects for liberal peace started to falter. Ever since, it’s been justified on pragmatic grounds as an instrument of easing the local implementation of universal standards of governance. As a result, it is operationalized through techniques which aim to responsibilize but not always to empower the locals. Ultimately, this alien governmentality, combinomg liberal and disciplinary elements, gives rise to various forms of local resistance, both direct and indirect. That’s why locals can’t own international intervention!

This is an important insight because it sheds a novel light not only on the local ownership principle but also on the evolution of international security governance. Contrary to hegemonic accounts that interpret local ownership as a form of liberal security governance, I have situated the emergence of this principle in the context of the global decline of liberalism. This process started with the failed interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, continued with the global economic crisis and entered the critical phase with the recent rise of anti-liberal populism in the US and Europe. In such a context, the political rationality of governing insecurities in the peripheries of West seems to be moving away from the cosmopolitan ideals of the liberal peace to a more conservative position that aims to govern less but better and through local proxies. The diffusion of the local ownership principle is therefore an expression of this governmental shift from liberalizing the volatile periphery to stabilizing it. This new governmental reason of international peacebuilding seeks to contain rather than permanently eradicate endemic insecurities in the global south.

All this brings us to a new puzzle. If local ownership keeps on failing to produce the expected results, why is it then, time and again, vindicated on pragmatic grounds as the best way to ensure sustainability? Is there something deeply “irrational” about the rhetoric and practice of local ownership or imperfect as it is, it still fulfils some deeper needs of peacebuilders? If yes, what are they? Could it be that the rhetorical attachment to local ownership principle helps international peacebuilders in maintaining their self-identity narratives (as self-restrained liberal actors) intact while its top-down operationalization allows the disguised practice of imposition to continue unabated? To answer these questions, future studies could draw on theories that deal with identity narratives, ontological security and cognitive dissonance in IR.

The evidence used in this article was taken from CSDP missions with a special emphasis on EUCAP Nestor. I have shown why the EU, which champions local ownership, continues to punch bellow its weight in its CSDP interventions due to the recurring problem of weak local ownership. The article, however, has focused on obstacles to ownership that stem from the very political rationality of the principle that is common to virtually all peacebuilding interventions. The article however, didn’t tackle the obstacles to ownership that stem from the very nature of the EU and CSDP. In addition to these universal obstacles, in the context of CSDP missions, ownership is also hampered by the EU’s strong impulse to normalize others, rigid financial procedures, member states micromanagement, quick turnover rates as well as horizontal and vertical incoherencies. Future studies could investigate how these and other unique characteristics of the EU as a peacebuilder affect the prospects of local ownership in CSDP interventions.

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1. Interviews were conducted during field work in Kosovo (February 2016), Brussels (June 2016), Israel/Palestine (October 2016) and in Somalia/Somaliland (November 2016). All interviewees preffered to stay anonimous. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 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). Since the Strategic Reviw from March 2015 the mission phased out of the region and focused on Somalia where the problem of piracy originates. In December 2016, the Council of the European Union extended the mandate of the mission until December 2018 and renamed the mission into EUCAP Somalia (EU, 2016, p. 18). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In the field of development, where the ownership principle emerged first in the early 1990s, it first and foremost aimed to correct deficiencies of overly intrusive previous international engagements such as the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and IMF and excessive conditionality linked to them (Joseph, 2012, p. 248). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As such it meant to complement and serve as an exit strategy of EU’s naval counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia (EUNAFOR Atalanta) launched in December 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.somalilandcoastguard.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Somaliland Coast Guard (SLCG) was established as part of the Somaliland National Army in 1995. However, due to arms embargo, nobody wanted to support such a Coast Goard so it was separated from the Army and placed under the command of the Ministry of Interior by a presidential decree in 2005 (Interview 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)