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The Distinction of Peace

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Published by University of Michigan Press

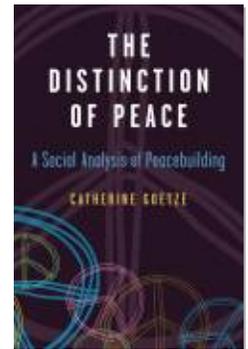
Goetze, Catherine.

The Distinction of Peace: A Social Analysis of Peacebuilding.

University of Michigan Press, 2017.

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The Habitus



The habitus of peacebuilding is multifaceted and complex. Although the preceding chapters have shown that there is a relatively high level of social similarity among peacebuilders in terms of social origin and education, it would certainly be wrong to see them as a monolithic bloc. As a field, peacebuilding allows for various dynamics of relational positioning; people will agree or disagree about certain policies, activities, or opinions depending on the social position they seek to defend or acquire in relation to others. Yet peacebuilders are not totally free in what they think and feel, or how they will behave with respect to this or that event in the field. Behavior has to be readable by others, understandable, and, to a certain but crucial extent, agreeable to them. Despite wanting to distinguish themselves from their peers, individuals also need to fit in. The habitus of a social group comprises, therefore, a range of socially possible behaviors and demeanors.

The concept of habitus does not deny individual agency, but describes the social conditions of the body and mind, which can both be enabling and restraining, under which agents act. The range of behaviors, opinions and ideas, and demeanors that a peacebuilder can display is circumscribed by the boundaries and limited by the content of the peacebuilding field as a professional field and a social group. The relational character of social positioning creates certain expectations of what a peacebuilder is like. Quite literally, the right habitus allows an individual to be “at the right place” when occupying a certain position—

as seen both by others and by her or himself.¹ Importantly, habitus as an analytical concept goes beyond role playing. Habitus is internalized and naturalized. An individual is perceived to be “at the right place” exactly because the social expectations, behaviors, ideas, discourses, and manners meet easily and naturally at that point of the social field where precisely such a configuration of economic, social, and cultural capital is required that this specific individual can display.² The objective structure of the field that sets specific criteria of the place to be occupied, and the subjective structure of the social individual that makes her or him cultivate those personality traits that fit the place, both have to come together to create a specific habitus. The double movement of socialization and individual internalization of the habitus—what Bourdieu called the “external interiorization”—makes it appear to be obvious or common sense behavior. This deep social normalization of a specific kind of behavior sets the foundation of its own reproduction as it becomes a marker of distinction and of recognition of equals among equals.³

As an analytical concept, habitus therefore allows retracing those expectations of behavior. The answers to the following questions provide descriptions of the expectations of a good peacebuilder: What kinds of sensibilities do they have? What kind of behavior is acceptable or even desirable? What attitudes and opinions will find an audience and, preferably, a positive reception? What kinds of political and social ideas are considered appropriate and adequate for peacebuilders? What kinds of visions of peace are common sense in the field?

The following three chapters formulate answers to these questions: first, by looking at the peacebuilders’ sensibilities; second, at the range of political ideas they display and how these tie in with their activities; and, third, how the visions of peace are formulated to be “normal” or “obvious” in the field.