

**BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE: HOW BOREDOM SHAPES THE ENACTMENT OF  
IDEALIZED FUTURES IN EXTREME CONTEXTS**

**Madeleine Rauch**

University of Cambridge

Judge Business School

Cambridge, UK

Email: m.rauch@jbs.cam.ac.uk

Accepted for publication at *Academy of Management Journal*

**Acknowledgement**

I'm indebted to UN peacekeeping officers sharing their personal diaries with me and allowing me a glimpse into their reality. I also express my gratitude to the handling AE Juliane Reinecke, and three excellent reviewers for their insightful and developmental feedback. I thank Woody Powell, Shaz Ansari, Ines Kuric, Markus Haellgren, Namrata Malhotra, Renate Kratochvil, Andrea Geissinger, Ali Guemusay, Lorenzo Skade, and Matthias Wenzel for comments on previous versions of this paper and conversations, and a special thanks to the "snails" writing group. This paper has also benefited from seminar discussions at Stanford, Harvard, Imperial, Bayes, Kings College, and Nets and Orgs, and conferences at PROS 2024, EGOS 2024 and AOM 2024.

## **BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE: HOW BOREDOM SHAPES THE ENACTMENT OF IDEALIZED FUTURES IN EXTREME CONTEXTS**

### **Abstract**

To investigate how workers enact idealized futures in extreme contexts, I analyze 63 unsolicited personal diaries of UN peacekeeping officers, as well as interviews, documents, and observational data related to UN peacekeeping missions. My findings reveal how peacekeepers navigate tensions between their idealized aspirations to achieve peace and the often mundane aspects of their fieldwork. Central to these tensions is the experience of existential boredom, which plays a crucial role in shaping their responses. Peacekeepers respond to existential boredom in two ways. Some embrace boredom and follow a pathway of situational adjustment of their moral values, redefining the meaning of the idealized future, and anchoring the temporal orientation in the present reality. Others renounce boredom and follow a pathway of adherence by clinging to their moral values, maintaining the meaning of the idealized future, and anchoring the temporal orientation in the idealized future. The enactment of either a *pragmatic* or *absolute* idealized future, respectively, has important implications for the adoption of new work practices. I contribute to the literatures on futures and boredom by showing how boredom influences the enactment of idealized futures and identifying implications for day-to-day work in extreme contexts.

*Keywords:* idealized future, extreme context, boredom, morality, mundane work

## INTRODUCTION

*I'm three months here [South Sudan]. I came motivated to kick war to the curb, to help civilians to have a chance for a peaceful future. ... It's the rainy season and the area we can cover by foot [patrolling] is small. We cannot reach most villages that we would like to access. We cannot do much in fact. ... Warring groups continue to fight. Ceasefires are violated every other day, but we just patrol and patrol and patrol. ... Peacekeeping is 10% impact, and 90% boredom. Is my job waiting for peace? Is peacekeeping standing around bored waiting for peace?*

–Peacekeeper (D19, Spring 2017)

This diary entry was written by a peacekeeping officer working for the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)—the UN’s largest peacekeeping mission, deployed in the world’s newest country. UN peacekeepers, also known as blue helmets, are known to be highly motivated by an idealized future, i.e., peace in war-torn countries. An idealized future is rooted in an aspirational set of values and morals, rather than in the current reality and serves as a strong impetus for change for an organization and its members. At the same time, the quote above points to the mundane realities of daily work, which may lead to boredom, defined as an emotional experience associated with an absence of meaning (Barbalet, 1999). The use of this term in the quote raises an important question: How do workers who are deeply motivated to enact idealized futures experience and respond to boredom at work?

The literature on futures has proliferated in the last two decades (Beckert, 2016; Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022; Thompson & Bryne, 2021; Van Elk et al., forthcoming), departing from long-held assumptions about a “quantifiable” and “knowable” future (Augustine et al., 2019; Wenzel et al., 2020: 1447). Scholars have identified several perspectives that enable workers to make the future “actionable” (e.g., Beckert & Bonk, 2018; Slawinski & Bansal, 2017; Whyte, Comi, & Mosca, 2022), such as future-making practices and imagining future alternatives (Rindova & Martins, 2022; Wenzel, 2022; Thompson, 2018). For example, Comi and Whyte (2018) illustrated how visual artifacts are used to enact the future in architectural work. Likewise, Pettit et al. (2023) showed how future-making cycles enable an abstract vision to be translated into actions to

facilitate strategic change by integrating an imagined future into everyday practices. In their study of the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, Alimadadi et al. (2022) showed how workers navigate the interplay between despair about an undesirable future and hope for a desirable future. Yet, notwithstanding such notable exceptions, most studies have focused on how futures are imagined, directing less attention to the challenges involved in how “actors produce and enact the future” (Wenzel et al., 2020: 1443).

Workers, who pursue an idealized future, tend to be highly motivated and driven by moral values. Many derive a high degree of satisfaction and meaning from following their “calling” (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017; Wrzesniewski, 2003). However, despite their idealized aspirations to enact change, workers often find their daily tasks to be mundane and monotonous, falling well short of the impactful work they had anticipated (Clarke 2008; Liberman & Trope, 1998). Such a disconnect is further amplified in extreme contexts (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Rauch & Ansari, 2022) where work is often described as “5% horror and 95% boredom (or waiting)” (Maeland & Brunstad, 2009: 1). Feelings of boredom at work in such contexts are widespread; estimates show that up to 87% of employees experience them (Fisher, 1999; van Hooff & van Hooff, 2014). Indeed, “boredom is one of the major problems experienced by those engaged in peacekeeping missions” (Harris & Segal, 1985: 235). Studies on workplace boredom (Barbalet, 1999; Shin & Grant, 2019) mostly focus on idleness and its negative organizational consequences, including low morale and disengagement (Conry, Becker, & Menges, 2018). In extreme and often hostile contexts, boredom can jeopardize security, compromise a mission’s success (de Rond, 2017; Kalkman, 2023), or even prompt workers to abandon the mission. Yet in many instances, workers persevere, indicating that there is much to learn about how boredom influences workers’ enactment of their idealized futures.

To understand how peacekeepers enact their idealized future of peace while conducting mundane work in an extreme context, I conducted an inductive qualitative study. I analyzed 63 unsolicited personal diaries, interviews, field observations, and archival data from peacekeepers working for the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping during active missions in Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan. Peacekeeping officers who work in conflict zones are deeply committed to the goal of peace. However, attaining this goal is often elusive; many areas remain in a state of protracted war for decades and even centuries, with no “easy” solutions in sight in the immediate future.

My findings show that peacekeepers responded to boredom in two distinct ways. Some workers embraced boredom and followed a pathway of *boredom-inspired adjustments* by updating their morals, redefining the meaning of the idealized future, and anchoring the temporal orientation of their activities in the present reality. These peacekeepers reframed misalignment to facilitate the adoption of new work practices, thereby enacting a *pragmatic* idealized future. In contrast, other workers renounced boredom and followed a pathway of *boredom-inspired adherence* by clinging to their morals, maintaining the meaning of the idealized future, and anchoring their temporal orientation in the idealized distant future. These peacekeepers perpetuated misalignment to thwart the adoption of new work practices, thereby enacting an *absolute* idealized future.

The findings contribute to two streams of literature. First, I contribute to the literature on futures by introducing the notion of *idealized futures*—visions of how the world is imagined to be, grounded in strong moral beliefs. I show how workers actively enact these idealized futures while performing mundane tasks in extreme contexts (Beckert, 2016; Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022; Rindova & Martins, 2022; Van Elk et al., forthcoming). While existing studies emphasize the processes of imagining or narrating futures (Pitsis et al., 2003; Wenzel et al., 2020), I shift the

focus to how meaning and morality guide the enactment of these futures. This concept advances the literature by moving beyond future-making (Pettit et al., 2023; Whyte et al., 2022) and imagination (Augustine et al., 2019; Thompson & Byrne, 2021). I show that in extreme contexts, highly motivated workers enact futures based on their moral values. In doing so, I illustrate how workers' willingness to adjust their moral values situationally is interconnected with temporal orientations. This highlights how meaning and morality shape future enactment, offering a fresh perspective on how futures are enacted in extreme environments.

Second, I contribute to the literature on workplace boredom in extreme contexts (Barbalet, 1999; Loukidou et al., 2009; Kent & Granqvist, forthcoming) by identifying diverse responses to boredom at work. Existing research has focused on the negative consequences of boredom from mundane or repetitive tasks, often leading to disillusionment and disengagement (Roy, 1959; Darden, 1999), even in extreme contexts (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Kalkman, 2023). However, my findings reveal boredom as a double-edged sword. While boredom can trigger disengagement, it can also motivate workers to address the lack of meaning in their work (Barbalet, 1999; Johnsen, 2016; Teeger, 2023). While situational boredom often leads to negative outcomes, existential boredom, which arises from a deeper sense of meaninglessness and lack of purpose in work, can be transformative. In extreme contexts, confronting existential boredom allows workers to recalibrate the meaning and morality attached to their idealized future, redefine their sense of purpose, and restore meaning in their work.

## **THEORETICAL MOTIVATION**

Interest in futures has proliferated in organization theory and management research in recent decades (Bansal et al., 2022; Parker, 2002; Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2021). Many of the most pressing challenges and phenomena of recent times, such as climate change and peace, have

necessitated organizational scholars to conceptualize the future as an “open-ended temporal category” (Wenzel et al., 2020: 1447). This shift has facilitated the emergence of different perspectives and concepts, such as future-making (Comi & Whyte, 2018; Wenzel et al., 2020; Whyte et al., 2022), alongside imagination (e.g., Augustine et al., 2019; Beckert, 2021; Thompson & Bryne, 2022) as central, among other perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

Future making is defined as “the work of making sense of possible and probable futures, and evaluating, negotiating and giving form to preferred ones” (Whyte et al., 2022: 2). From this perspective, the future is perceived as an “ongoing inquiry” (Wenzel et al., 2020) with a focus on studying future-making practices in organizations, including strategy, design, and project work (Alimadadi et al., 2022; Comi & Whyte, 2018). For example, in their study of architectural work, Comi and Whyte (2018) showed how visualization and artifacts help enact a future. In an R&D context, Pettit et al. (2023: 1776) showed how “through future-making cycles, imaginings of a desired future are embedded into ways of working to deliver change.” Studying a restoration and renewal program at Westminster Palace, Alimadadi et al. (2022) showed how organizational actors navigate undesirable and desirable future events to create a viable path of action. Emphasizing the importance of grand challenges, Whyte et al. (2022: 15) pointed out that “future-making is always difficult, especially so as we face these challenging and potentially dystopic futures.”

A second perspective emphasizes how imaginative futures can help organizations address uncertainty. This perspective draws on the assumption that in fast-paced environments, organizations should consider fictional or imaginative depictions of the future to shape what ultimately becomes reality (Beckert, 2013; Dries et al., 2023). Imagination defined as “the ability

---

<sup>1</sup> Other perspectives, such as scenario planning, forecasting, and prospective sensemaking, have also developed in parallel; however, these streams are less central to the aim of this paper and the phenomenon of peace (see Comi & Whyte, 2018 for a more complete review of the literature).

to form pictures in one's mind of something that cannot be immediately sensed or that has not been previously perceived: the unreal, unreal, and surreal. Imagining is making the absent present" (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022: 238). For example, Augustine et al. (2019) drew on the example of geoengineering to illustrate how an as-if reality helped individuals take a fictional technology seriously enough to orient their actions around realizing its potential to address climate change. An as-if reality is an "inhabitation in the mind of an imagined future state of the world" (Beckert, 2013: 219). Scholars also have connected this perspective to addressing grand challenges: "As an academic approach, we need disciplined imagination not only of what is feasible and probable, but also of what is desirable" (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022: 238). Rindova and Martins (2022: 213) illustrated how such imaginations can be "versions of the future that represent what could be or what ought to be." From this perspective, futures are "alternative states and possible outcomes that could occur but have not yet occurred because, to be actualized, they require the enactment of individual, social, and environmental events that are often serendipitous" (Lord et al., 2015: 264).

Both perspectives have considerably enriched our understanding of futures. The future-making perspective has enriched our understanding on the role of enacting futures. This perspective often draws on visualization and materialization employed in project settings with an "end goal" in mind, such as finishing a cathedral or an architectural job, or achieving strategic change. The literature on imagination reverses the arrow by starting with a vision of the future that might be very distant and deviate significantly from present-day solutions, requiring people to abandon their "well trotted ways" (Grimes & Vogus, 2021; Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Wright, 2010). However, much less is known about how such imagination occurs and is enacted, when it is not treated as an "as-if reality", such as in the case of idealized futures.

Idealized futures are distinct from existing concepts. I define idealized futures as depictions of how the world ought to be based on strong moral beliefs that direct the behavior of individuals, groups, organizations, and society. Such representations provide a strong impetus for change. To address multiplex, deep-seated problems around the globe, aid organizations, public organizations, NGOs and other organizations follow a “strong calling” that becomes their “raison d’être” as they seek to enact idealized futures by, for example, eradicating famine, providing free medical assistance, and establishing peace.

Tackling large societal problems is the very purpose of organizations like the World Food Program, Médecins Sans Frontières, and UN Peacekeeping. Workers and volunteers join such organizations because they align with their strong ideals and moral understanding of societal issues. For example, Rauch and Ansari (2024: 11) found that medical professionals leave their “cushy jobs in New York City” to join MSF because they buy into the idea of “provid[ing] medical assistance to vulnerable populations.” In the case of UN peacekeeping, the ultimate goal is very clear: to establish peace. The notion of an idealized future is thus distinct from other concepts in the futures literature, which treat the future as “provisional and incomplete” and “discuss and negotiate different preferred futures” (Whyte et al., 2022: 5). Embracing a spirit of open-mindedness, these understandings of futures are often formed with the help of visuals and talked into existence. Researchers have also invoked the concept of “desirable” futures. However, the conceptualization of what constitutes desirable varies. For some, such desirability involves strategic change projects (e.g., Pettit et al., 2023), while for others, particularly those who emphasize the climate emergency, it stresses moving away from considerations of the probable future (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2024).

Taken together, extant research has generated valuable insights into how workers and organizations enact futures, including barriers, conjectures, and different forms of futures (Adam, 2011; Beckert, 2013; Whyte et al., 2022). However, more research is needed to understand how workers with “boots on the ground” enact futures in their daily work. In other words, more work is needed to better understand the “often subtle, partly mundane ... ways in which organizational actors engage with the future” (Wenzel, 2021: 10).

### **Boredom as an Emotion in Extreme Contexts**

In research on extreme contexts ranging from active war zones (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Rauch & Ansari, 2022) to pandemics (Rao & Greve, 2018; Wright et al., 2021), scholars often study organizations that are striving to enact idealized futures. The work realities of soldiers and medical professionals in extreme contexts (e.g., DiBeningno, 2022; Kalkman, 2023) have predominantly been portrayed as action-filled, fast-paced, and dangerous (Fraher et al., 2015). Findings show that aid workers, medical professionals and soldiers experience emotional ambivalence (e.g., guilt, shame, pride) but often do not express these emotions (Rauch & Ansari, 2024); they do not “obsess over the what-ifs” (Fraher et al., 2015: 252), but instead exercise emotional control in seemingly hopeless situations (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Farny et al., 2018). This is surprising, as frontline personnel (e.g., soldiers), only engage in adrenaline-fueled action about 10% of the time, “with the rest of it involving terrible boredom” (Haellgren et al., 2018: 141).

Ethnographic evidence from de Rond and Lok’s (2016: 1971) study of personnel at Camp Bastion highlights how “medics struggled to deal with the long spells of inactivity when waiting for new patients to come in.” Such tendencies have been long documented, as Goodhart (1947: 48) pointed out that “life in the Army is made up of months of extreme boredom followed by

moments of extreme fear.” Similarly, a study of storm chasers in Tornado Valley reveals how workers “with little or nothing to do” (de Rond, 2012: 258) for long periods of time may experience a “loss of professional identity, and [exhibit] counterproductive behavior” (Kent & Granqvist, forthcoming: 2). Likewise, findings show that “getting a high” from busyness in professional settings can have downsides, as “quiet time could lead to anxiety and boredom” (Lupa & Rokka, 2022: 1414).

Although these findings acknowledge boredom in the workplace, few scholars have theorized how boredom affects workers’ approaches to organizational activities. This is surprising, as boredom has been described as “one of the most unexpectedly common of all human emotions” (Toohey, 2011: 1) which is “interwoven into the fabric of everyday life” (Steinmetz et al., 2017: 343). Boredom refers to “an unpleasant, transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity,” such that “it takes conscious effort to maintain or return attention to that activity” (Fisher, 1993: 396). *Langeweile*, the German word for boredom, literally refers to a long while (Johnsen, 2016). Experiencing a period with a perceived absence of meaning (Barbalet, 1999; Johnsen, 2022) often prompts individuals to ask, “What shall we do now?” (Johnsen, 2016: 1405). The French word for boredom, *ennui*, reflects workers’ feelings of dissatisfaction and disengagement (Roy, 1959). While has often been associated with work characterized by repetition and monotony, such as in industrial factories dominated by Taylorism (Loukidou et al., 2009; Park, Lim & Oh, 2019), it is also a challenge in the knowledge society (Costas & Kaerreman, 2016). In extreme contexts, boredom is known to cause profound distress for frontline workers, such as soldiers, some of whom “pray for contact (with the enemy) as farmers pray for rain” (Hetherington, 2010: 15).

However, such boredom is not well understood, particularly in extreme contexts where

workers are attempting to enact an idealized future. Highlighting the often-mundane nature of work in extreme contexts, scholars have called for more research to explore dynamics associated with boredom. In their study of medical professionals who volunteered for MSF, Rauch and Ansari (2024: 26) called for “paying greater attention to temporal dynamics, such as the mundane practices of work and experience of boredom.” Steinmetz et al. (2017: 354) asserted that “boredom does provide an impetus toward action but it does so by opening a space for *imagining alternative possibilities* in circumstances” (emphasis added). Likewise, in a study on the routine dynamics of firefighters, Geiger et al. (2020: 257) called for research on the “accomplishment of work on experiences of distress and eustress, or on feelings of relaxation or boredom.”

However, less is known about dynamics at the intersection between futures and emotions—specifically, boredom—in extreme contexts. Bridging these literatures, I follow Wenzel et al.’s (2020: 1443) call to study “the specific ways in which actors produce and enact the future.” In a similar vein, Butler et al. (2011: 333) articulated: “Boredom reminds us of the paucity of the present and holds open the prospect of an *as-yet undetermined future*” (emphasis added). I contribute to this discussion by focusing on frontline personnel in extreme contexts, as little is known about how they continue to derive inspiration and meaning from an idealized future as they navigate the mostly mundane aspects of their work. To understand how highly motivated individuals resolve this tension, I ask: *How does boredom shape workers’ enactment of idealized futures in extreme contexts?*

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Context and Site

To generate a grounded understanding of how peacekeepers experience their work and how they enact an idealized future of peace, I conducted an inductive study by analyzing unsolicited

personal diaries, interviews, and non-participant observations of UN peacekeeping missions in extreme contexts.<sup>2</sup> UN peacekeepers play a central role in attempts to restore order in countries and regions plagued by military conflicts, atrocities, and civil unrest, sometimes for decades. UN peacekeeping missions aim to help with conflict prevention and mediation, peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding under particularly grave circumstances (United Nations, 2018).

Drawing on the UN Charter, the UN Security Council grants the responsibility and power to take collective action to maintain international peace and security to promote “universal peace” (United Nations, Chapter 1). UN peacekeeping was initially established during the Cold War as a way to resolve conflicts between states by deploying unarmed military personnel under UN command to regions requiring neutral observation of the peace process. As of 2022, there had been 72 UN peacekeeping operations since the first mission to the newly established State of Israel (UNTSO) in 1948. Currently, there are 12 ongoing peacekeeping missions and proposals for new missions are developed each year, reflecting the volatile and fragile state of peace around the globe (UN Peacekeeping, 2008).

The UN has no active army or police force; member states contribute the military and police personnel required for each mission’s operations. In 2022, more than 100,000 people participated in UN peacekeeping missions, including more than 85,000 uniformed personnel, as well as 12,000 civilians and 1,300 volunteers. Once approved by the UN Security Council, a resolution is formulated and agreed upon. As a conflict unfolds, the UN frequently consults with the potential host government, relevant parties on the ground, other UN agencies, regional and other intergovernmental organizations, and key external partners. It is the goal of peacekeepers to monitor and oversee peace processes in post-conflict regions and help former combatants

---

<sup>2</sup> All identifying information has been anonymized and names have been changed.

implement the peace process based on signed peace agreements. This assistance takes many shapes and forms, such as engaging in capacity building to strengthen the rule of law, promoting economic and social development, and negotiating power-sharing arrangements.

I focused this inquiry on UN peacekeepers, given their central role in peacekeeping missions.<sup>3</sup> UN peacekeepers have many duties and tasks, such as protecting civilians, preventing conflicts, and providing field support for other humanitarian agencies. Typically, they spend 6–12 months in a country. Their daily work activities include establishing the rule of law, ensuring security for civilians, strengthening infrastructure, empowering women, and promoting human rights. Peacekeepers typically are trained law enforcement officers with extensive experience in their home countries. Peacekeepers in extreme contexts are assigned to missions (from largest to smallest) in South Sudan (UNMISS), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Lebanon (UNIFIL), Mali (MINUSMA), Kosovo (UNMIK), Western Africa (MINURSO), and Cyprus (UNFICYP). They live in compounds similar to military bases or heavily guarded humanitarian bases due to the often hostile and sometimes dangerous situations on the ground.

## **Data**

I collected four types of data focused on UN peacekeeping officers: unsolicited personal diaries (D), interviews (I), informal conversations (IC), and non-participant observations documented in field notes (FN), as well as internal documents (ID) and archival documents (AD; see Table 1). Unsolicited diaries were the primary data source, given their relevance to this research interest in the experiences of workers involved in active UN missions. Given security concerns and instability, traditional methods such as ethnography requiring longer study periods

---

<sup>3</sup> I use the term “peacekeepers” broadly, cutting across hierarchical differences (e.g., between officers and soldiers). I refrain from specifying exact titles to protect the anonymity of informants.

were not appropriate. To gain further insights into the realities of their work on the ground, I interviewed all peacekeepers except one (N = 62) after reading their diaries several times and taking extensive notes on emerging themes. To gain a better understanding of contextual factors affecting their work, I collected non-participant observations of a two-week UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan in 2019. Table 2 provides an overview of diarists' characteristics, including work experience, gender, and professional circumstances. Before starting this research, I engaged in various conversations with active peacekeepers and extensively studied foundational UN documents such as the *2003 Peacekeeping Handbook* and *2008 Principles and Guidelines*, also known as the *Capstone Doctrine*, which is regarded as the “bible of peacekeeping” (I10).

--- Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here ---

**Diaries.** A diary is a personal document offering emic reflections rather than etic observations (Rauch & Ansari, 2021: 208) created by an “individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record” (Alaszweski, 2006: 2), thereby providing “an intimate view of organizations, relationships, and events from the perspective of one who has experienced them him- or herself” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975: 7). Diaries are particularly valuable for collecting real-time information and capturing reflections and perceptions, especially those related to unpredictable events (Balogun et al., 2003). This approach was particularly valuable for understanding workers' motivations, work-related ideals and morals, future aspirations, experiences, and reflections during their deployments when (ethnographic) access was difficult due to ongoing security threats in countries such as Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given my interest in futures, working with unsolicited diaries enabled me to tap into what Beckert (2016: 133) described as “sometimes long forgotten, guided decisions in the past and sharpened the path to the futures imagined today.”

Unlike solicited logs (Burgess, 1984), diary entries were written voluntarily, spanning periods from 31 months to 9 years. The analytical focus centered on their peacekeeping assignments, from 2 years prior to mission commencement to 2 years after deployment, between 2013 and 2018 (see Figure 1 for a detailed illustration). This approach enabled me to compare peacekeepers' experiences, reflections, and emotions in "settled times" to those in "unsettled times". I obtained voluntary and consensual access to the diaries and ensured the anonymization of all data to protect the diarists' identities.

The diaries exhibited varying degrees of detail and writing styles. Many diarists provided intricate descriptions of routines, practices, personal reflections, and emotional states, often extending beyond their work-related experiences. Peacekeepers described the practice of maintaining a diary as "a means to create a personal space for reflection" and "a habit I had already developed prior to my service in the police." The diaries existed in both handwritten and electronic formats, all authored by individuals who identified as native English speakers. The nine handwritten diaries were professionally transcribed for further analysis. To protect the anonymity of the diarists, their assigned missions and work-related and security-sensitive data, I anonymized each diary quote used in the text. To facilitate analysis, I clustered them into five phases to reveal different patterns and reactions, i.e., Phase I: pre-deployment; Phase II: 1–3 months in the field; Phase III: 3–9 months in the field; Phase IV: 9–12 months in the field; Phase V: post-deployment, at home. This clustering enabled me to further study the temporal structure underlying the diaries while protecting the anonymity and sensitivity of the context and the diarists. I analyzed all qualitative data using NVivo.

***Interviews.*** In addition to the diaries, I conducted interviews with all diarists except one due to scheduling conflicts (N = 62). During these interviews, I asked clarifying questions about

their experiences and reflections on their work which helped to understand their motivations and the difficulties they faced. I also conducted seven additional interviews with other peacekeepers who were not diarists, but worked in peacekeeping or functions important to peacekeeping. These additional interviews enabled me to verify my findings across settings, including UN missions I did not observe (e.g., in Asia), as well as “political” dynamics at UN headquarters. All interviews except one were recorded and professionally transcribed. In total, I conducted 69 interviews which lasted 78 minutes, on average (see Table 3 for details).

----Insert Table 3 about here-----

**Observations.** Given the unstable situation characterizing many peacekeeping missions, the recommendations of local governments, and global travel advisories, I observed one UN mission to South Sudan in 2019 (UNMISS) after participating in extensive briefings and safety-related training. For two weeks, I followed peacekeepers in their daily work and activities, traveling to various parts of the country, including the combat region, and observing daily briefings, staff meetings, and meetings with local politicians, army generals, and members of other local and international humanitarian agencies. Joining the UNMISS delegation was particularly revelatory, given my research interest, as South Sudan is the world’s newest nation and has yet to complete its democratic transition (e.g., its first-ever election). The country continues to face severe challenges amid a lack of basic infrastructure and the absence of many governmental and democratic processes.

UNMISS is currently the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping mission, with an annual budget of over 1.2 billion USD, a significant share of the total budget of 6.45 billion for all peacekeeping activities and missions (ID87). Given the nature of UN missions, I was with the delegation around the clock. Sleeping and eating in the same location, often in provisional housing

with little to no privacy, promoted bonding and enabled me to remain close to the “action.” I conducted many informal conversations between meetings and after work hours and personally experienced mundane aspects of peacekeeping (e.g., no running water, digestion problems, lack of privacy, domestic challenges associated with juggling one’s professional and private life). I spent 379 hours collecting non-participant observations (see Table 4 for details) both in the field and outside it. I also attended meetings and briefings at UN headquarters in New York and Geneva before and after the missions to further sensitize me to the context, as well as the political aspects of the UN and its different mandates.

-----Insert Table 4 about here-----

I often took notes when the peacekeeping personnel were engaged in administrative tasks such as writing daily reports and preparing documents requested from UN headquarters or other off-duty activities (e.g., calling relatives). These handwritten notes were transcribed within 24 hours. As my research progressed, I noticed patterns of disconnection between peacekeepers’ descriptions of their aspired future state of “peace” and their mundane work (e.g., patrolling for hours through muddy, remote areas). I remained in contact with numerous peacekeepers via email who provided additional reflections, pictures, and invitations to private and professional events (e.g., birthday parties, weddings, end-of-mission celebrations).

***Internal and archival data.*** This study also draws on multiple sets of internal and archival data, such as written guidelines and information provided by the UN and similar national and international associations (e.g., International Organization for Migration, MSF) on how to engage in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Other internal documents specified procedures, activities, and action plans detailing activities associated with specific mandates as well as frequent reports submitted to UN headquarters on various issues (e.g., gender-based violence, security protocols,

capacity building pertaining to democratic processes, etc.). These documents (see Table 5) also helped to better understand the UN's work and associated complexities.

-----Insert Table 5 about here-----

## **Data Analysis**

I adopted an iterative and inductive approach to data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Inspired by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Locke, 2001), I engaged in multiple rounds of reading and coding diaries, field notes, and interview transcriptions. My analysis unfolded in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding (Pratt et al., 2006). Although I describe the three stages linearly to ensure clarity, my analysis was iterative. During data collection, I wrote memos to document and verify emerging salient and puzzling themes and theoretical categories.

During the first stage, open coding, I aimed to understand how peacekeepers viewed their jobs, their motivations for joining the specific peacekeeping mission, and their experiences on the ground. At this stage, I stayed close to the data and language used by the peacekeepers (Locke, 2001). Initial open codes included “lack of impact,” “nothing to do,” “standing around,” “patrolling,” “future peace,” “lack of structure,” “lack of infrastructure,” “monotony,” “no roads,” and “tedious work.” In this process, I also discovered that peacekeepers were not shocked by the difficult situation (e.g., the instability), nor did they have problems adjusting to the new working environment. Instead, many of their diary entries revealed how boredom was an integral part of their work and daily routines, often referencing many hours of “just standing around” (D6, Phase II) despite the peacekeeping mission's mandate to “create lasting change and peace.” UN peacekeepers described themselves as “change agents” (D60, Phase I) with strong ambitions to “have real impact” and ultimately “change the world to a peaceful, happy, and just place” (I19),

pointing to the importance of the “future” to both workers and the organization. One peacekeeper said, “[A] UN Peacekeeper lives on a future promise. It’s our reason of being” (I12). This initial discovery during open coding led me to probe into the main drivers, which helped to discover that peacekeepers were highly motivated, guided, and inspired by an idealized future despite realities on the ground that limited their capacity to enact this desired change. However, they responded differently to their experienced boredom. Drawing on the power of the chronological sequence of diaries, I created timelines and identified their responses (Langley, 1999) which I organized into charts and tables to systematically compare individuals’ experiences of boredom and tease out similarities and differences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In the second stage of data analysis, axial coding, I clustered similar open codes into more meaningful abstract categories. This process helped to slowly move away from the language used by peacekeepers to a more theoretical vocabulary. Peacekeepers pointed out that the idealized future “was much more distant” and the UN’s mandate was difficult to implement. Yet, they demonstrated a substantial commitment and motivation to establish and create peace and stabilize the situation on the ground, reaffirming that “peace is the only future there can be for humanity” (D23, Phase II). Peacekeepers extensively described a state of boredom, pointing to long hours of patrolling, standing around, and “not doing anything” (D22, Phase II). At this point, I also recognized two different responses to “being so bored” (D11) and closely examined these patterns. Some peacekeepers actively renounced and sought to avoid boredom, emphasizing its misalignment with the UN’s organizational values and idealized future, and framing it as “morally wrong” (D10, Phase II). However, other peacekeepers embraced boredom as something positive: “our boredom is a sign that peace is moving along.” Recognizing these patterns across diaries, I clustered them into two groups based on these two main responses to boredom: *renouncing* (D1–

D22) and *embracing* (D23–D63). This division helped to further probe the similarities and differences between the groups to elucidate the “how and why” driving these responses. In this step, I also recognized that some workers stressed the importance of *peacekeeping* while others focused on *peacebuilding*, and that these terms have fundamentally different meanings.

In the third step of data analysis, I engaged in theoretical coding by exploring how the different axial codes fit together into a larger theoretical puzzle (Charmaz, 2006). I turned to the literature on futures (Augustine et al., 2018; Beckert, 2013), boredom (Barbalet, 1999), and extreme contexts (Haellgren et al., 2018), but I soon realized that conversations across these literatures were limited, with little focus on “the specific ways in which actors produce and enact the future” (Wenzel et al., 2020: 1443). Moreover, work appeared to be less action-filled in extreme contexts than often portrayed (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Kalkman, 2023) and boredom typically was framed as positive. This seemed noteworthy and prompted to “zoom in,” as boredom typically is treated as situational and associated with negative implications in the management and organization literature (Loukidou et al., 2009).

My data suggested that boredom was much more *existential* in this context and that workers actively engaged with their experience of it because it challenged their ascribed purpose. Drawing on the chronology and comparisons across different phases and peacekeepers helped to identify underlying patterns in peacekeepers’ responses to the misalignment between their work’s mundane reality and the desired future. At this point, I recognized that workers either *questioned their ideals and morals* or *questioned their work practices*, deeming them inadequate to enact their idealized future. At this point, I also consulted different concepts in the literature such as disengagement at work compared to existential boredom. However, disengagement involves “uncoupling [the] self from role” obligations and performing “tasks at some distance from their preferred selves, which

remain split off and hidden;” and workers often become “emotionally disconnected from others in ways that hide what they think and feel, their creativity, their beliefs and values, and their personal connections to others” (Kahn, 1990: 701–702). However, existential boredom, as Heidegger (1995: 164) powerfully described, refers to “the fundamental emptiness that bores us,” which describes the patterns found in the data.

I then re-engaged with the data to gain deeper insights into “how and why” some peacekeepers embraced boredom and followed a pathway of *adjustment*, while others renounced boredom and followed a pathway of *adherence*. In doing so, I was able to identify sub-practices associated with these pathways pertaining to *morals*, the *meaning* of the idealized future, and the *temporal orientation* of their work. Drawing on the processual nature of this data, I further mapped outcomes of these two pathways. The data revealed differences in peacekeepers’ willingness to adopt new work practices in phases III and IV. For example, one worker described being content to “watch locals dance around a fire” (D41, Phase IV) whereas another was appalled by a request “to join a football tournament in the name of peace” (D3, Phase IV). I noticed at this point that the former had adopted a more “contextualized view of peace” (I31), thereby enacting a *pragmatic* idealized future, while the latter contended that “peace is absolute regardless of anything” (D5, Phase IV), thereby enacting an *absolute* idealized future.

Finally, I attempted to abstract from the empirical case by developing a conceptual model to help explain how workers enact idealized futures in extreme contexts, and how and why boredom facilitates this process. In this step, I also discussed other potential emergent theoretical understandings from the data (Locke, 2001). I engaged in lengthy discussions with different professionals to develop a coherent framework for the different theoretical categories, discussing various alternative framings and relationships among them. To increase the trustworthiness of the

findings, I performed several member checks to ensure that the model accurately reflects the data, and engaged in various formal and informal conversations with other peacekeepers across a range of missions, mandates, hierarchical levels, and experiences.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings illustrate that UN peacekeepers identified strongly with their organization, work, and professional ethos, describing themselves as “change agents” (D60, Phase I) with strong ambitions to “have real impact” and ultimately “change the world to a peaceful, happy and just place” (I19). Peacekeepers expressed idealism and pride in their work, and a strong motivation to join peacekeeping efforts. Despite their aspirations to “create a new future for local civilians,” (D42, Phase I), repetitive tasks involving long periods of waiting and patrolling with seemingly little impact resulted in boredom, surfacing frustrations that led them to question the meaning and purpose of their work. Peacekeepers either embraced or renounced this existential boredom, following a pathway of either boredom-induced adjustments or adherence to underlying morals, the meaning of their work, and the temporal orientation of the idealized future. These approaches had important organizational implications, as they shaped workers’ enactment of either a *pragmatic* or an *absolute* idealized future. Additional supporting evidence is provided in Table 6.

-----Insert Table 6 about here-----

### **The Idealized Future**

Peacekeepers expressed strong aspirations to be change agents on the ground and enact an idealized future of peace, which they described as “the highest form of happiness” (D10, Phase I), the “foundation of life” (I31), and “the only life form worth living for” (D33, Phase I; I33). When asked to clarify what peace means, peacekeepers stressed that the answer “is actually not a trivial one” (I31). Their handbooks define peace as a “stress-free state of security and calmness that

comes when there's no fighting or war" (ID61). However, peacekeepers readily pointed out that peace goes beyond "merely no fighting" or "no shooting" (I50):

Peace is not only the absence of war, but takes into consideration and creates the context where civilians and all others can live among each other with respect, dignity, and children's biggest concern is that their mothers packed again the wrong sandwich for lunch break. The marginalized have voices and are heard. (I19)

At times, this seemed like an unattainable goal. For example, during the third day of the my field visit to Bor in the northern part of Juba, the capital of South Sudan, a negotiated ceasefire was violated once again, with many military fighters wounded on both sides and civilians severely affected (FN46). Many peacekeepers were emotionally crushed and morale was low as they gathered around a fireplace to eat an improvised dinner of plain rice. In a muted conversation, a peacekeeper who previously had spent significant time as an in-country coordinator for MONUSCO (Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) explained why he persevered:

*Peacekeeper:* Close your eyes [made sure that I actually closed my eyes]. Now, imagine here where we sit [on the floor in the dirt], children play football in peace. They don't worry about fighting. They run around having fun, laughing, being children. Innocent children, and not victims of war. They have a future. They go to school and have problems like you and I had before. No dead corpses on the side of the street like we saw three dozen and more today. They are just happy children. They have a future.

*Researcher:* So, this is why you work as a peacekeeper?

*Peacekeeper:* *This* [raised voice] is what peacekeeping is about. Can you see it? My work is to bring this future to them. (FN47)

When the researcher opened their eyes during the conversation, the peacekeeper insisted that they remain closed to "see the future of this place:" "Only if you are able to see the future, you can do your work as a peacekeeper" (FN47).

This idealized future was not only embraced by individual peacekeepers, but also inscribed in the overall mission as reflected in the organization's internal documents and external communications. For example, a report affirmed that the UN was established to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," and that one of its main purposes is to maintain international peace and security (UN Peacekeeping, 2008). This idealized future inspired and motivated

peacekeepers to have a “real impact in life” (I34) and a “long lasting impact for humanity” (D13, Phase I) that would be a “legacy for all the children of this world” (D50, Phase I).

### **Misalignment between the Realities of Work and the Idealized Future**

Although the peacekeepers studied were inspired by the idealized future, they quickly recognized a mismatch with the work situation on the ground. They described this incongruity with disappointment and frustration, often pointing out that their envisioned future seemed to be “galaxies away” (D13, Phase II) and “in the far distant” future (D10, Phase II).

While work assignments vary depending on the negotiated peace treaty and mission, most current missions include tasks such as “protection of civilians,” “building the capacity of the local police,” “provid[ing] security for the next election,” and “[facilitating the] transition to democratic elections” (I1234-1238). Peacekeepers across different missions described pressure to deliver on promises when enacting such futures. For example, peacekeepers described the main objectives of UNMISS—i.e., the “protection of civilians in South Sudan” (ID324) and to “provide stability to ensure the peace process can move forward” (ID54)—as “elusive” and “mountains of the size of 10x Mount Everest that need to be moved” (I22). One peacekeeper elaborated:

Help with peace consolidation, state building, economic development, conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution, provide security, establish rule of law, strengthen security and the justice sector. ... It’s a laundry list of issues. And I probably forgot half of what the mission is supposed to accomplish. ... Work demands are gigantic. Jesus walking on water sounds like what we are supposed to be doing before breakfast. (I45)

Peacekeeping missions are often established in regions with intense hostility; unrest and fierce fighting may last for decades before a long-winding peace process is initiated, as is the case in South Sudan and many neighboring African countries. For example, MONUSCO (Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) peacekeepers described being required to adopt a passive posture in response to belligerence and aggression. Peacekeepers often attributed this to a lack of resources:

We are in a country half of the size of America. Let's face it our little group size is just peanuts. Issues and problems run so deep here that we need 10x or 100x more men and material. ... At best, we can protect ourselves. (D38, Phase II)

Many peacekeepers reported instances of frustration and disillusionment. An experienced peacekeeper responsible for strategic aspects of missions who served as a liaison across different partners at UN headquarters in New York admitted:

The UN and peacekeeping has been at various times close to collapse. Let's talk Somalia, Rwanda, and former Yugoslavia. Very dark times for us [peacekeepers]. The UN has authorized missions that were de facto impossible to materialize. ... Peace in each of the contexts was elusive. Wishful thinking. (I65)

### **Experiencing Existential Boredom**

To my surprise, peacekeepers experienced existential boredom despite their strong desires to be “change makers” and “bring peace to South Sudan” (D22, Phase I) prior to their deployment. For example, peacekeepers described essential tasks such as patrolling (the majority of their daily work), monitoring, and writing reports as “monotonous” and “tedious” (I41; ID319) and made statements such as: “[I'm] tremendously bored by my work” (O10), “work is dull” (D22, Phase II), and “it's the same stuff every day” (D28, Phase II). This is unlike other work in extreme contexts performed by medical professionals or storm chasers who endure long periods “with little or nothing to do” (de Rond 2012: 258). Rather, peacekeepers' daily work routines are busy and extremely structured, similar to the military. After experiencing existential boredom, one peacekeeper described their work as “less meaningful than I thought it would be” (I21). Some even questioned whether these boring and monotonous tasks were facilitating the emergence of the idealized future of peace:

Young boys, very skinny in nature. They fight in flipflops. Often wearing football jerseys. It's like Bayern Munich is playing against Liverpool or Manchester United. But not in a football stadium but on the battleground. It's frustrating. [...] And then we are just patrolling, patrolling and patrolling, day in and out. Is this really how peace is made? [...] Aren't we here to bring peace because we are peacekeepers? (D55, Phase II)

Such statements were often paired with references to the fragile state of “peace” and their belief that “standing around and not doing anything” did not support one of their mission’s main goals, i.e., capacity building. “Being bored at work is frustrating when you want to change the world” (D11, Phase II). During the researcher’s field visit to South Sudan, peacekeepers directly linked their frustrations to the boring nature of their work as conflicts continued and many civilians continued to die by machete or hoe, while others were burned to death in their homes (FN55; FN56). One peacekeeper reflected:

You know it’s frustrating. We stand here. We watch and watch and watch [...] and nothing happens. There is no improvement in the situation. I’m here for 8 months. There is no peace. [...] We patrol, engage in dialogue; but 20 miles from here, they are fighting in the most primitive ways. They take rotor blades from car engines to kill others, wear shorts, and sandals. It’s the kind of 18<sup>th</sup> century warfare, eye to eye. (FN55)

Peacekeepers described their work as “highly repetitive” and expressed “displeasure” about their work tasks as “the same all over again” leading them to ask: “Is this how peace is created?”

### **Lack of Meaning and Questioning of Purpose**

The surprising experience of boredom was problematic, as it challenged peacekeepers’ strong convictions about the idealized future, resulting in a lack of meaning and leading them to question the purpose of their work and peacekeeping more broadly: “What the heck are we doing here” (D55, Phase II)? “Where is the meaning in any of this sitting around” (D31, Phase II)? A peacekeeper newly assigned to a remote area in Mali wrote: “I am here now. Boredom is everywhere but what does this mean for me? What does this mean for peacekeeping? Is this what the next 11 months and 2 weeks will look like” (D62, Phase II)? Many described feelings of unease and frustration, as well as a sense of “lostness” and not knowing “what to do with myself” (I23).

Can’t the UN not come up with something more drastic than making us walk around like puppets? We promise so much to everyone but we don’t deliver. How is this walking around and standing around REALLY having any impact and changing anything. I’m getting paid for being bored AF [as fuck]. (D54, Phase II)

Frustrations stemming from boredom were not unique to one mission or group, but “universally present,” as described by a senior officer at UN headquarters in Geneva (IC23). The UN provided little help, as its hierarchy is similar to the military where “some questions are better not asked unless you want to be kicked out” (I21). The organization did not attempt to address boredom by modifying peacekeeping mandates or work routines or by providing resources to accomplish their idealized future of peace. Thus, for peacekeepers, boredom was a “dominant force while working” (I10).

Peacekeepers exhibited two contrasting responses to existential boredom. Some questioned the morals and ideals of peacekeeping: “Can people in New York really dictate what ought to be going on here?” (D31, Phase II); “What are the set of norms and standards for us to comply?” (D37, Phase II); “Is my understanding between back at home and South Sudan the same?” (D58, Phase II). These peacekeepers ultimately embraced boredom and followed the pathway of boredom-induced adjustments. In contrast, others questioned their work practices “as not adequate enough for our UN moral standards” (Interview 10). Workers in this group asked: “What are the instruments in our possession to bring peace?” (D10, Phase II) and “Is this all we have in our tool kit?” (D03, Phase II). These peacekeepers renounced boredom and followed the pathway of boredom-induced adherence. These responses had significant ramifications for peacekeepers’ enactment of the idealized future. Below, I explicate how and why peacekeepers chose these pathways, the microprocesses involved, and their organizational implications.

### **Boredom-induced adjustments**

Most (41 of 63) peacekeepers embraced boredom as part of their work. During a field visit to a village 3 hours north of Juba, I joined a patrol to an adjacent village and observed what

appeared to be a local celebration with many people dancing to traditional music. A peacekeeper highlighted this situation as an example of why “standing around is a good thing:”

I’m really not into music, but this is great sighting. It’s super boring. It’s hot as hell. But look—they are dancing. They are celebrating. People are happy. ... Watching them dancing is a good thing. It’s a happy thing. It’s boring for us, but it’s a good thing. (O60)

Indeed, during a visit to New York to present the preliminary findings of this work, a senior official referred to peacekeepers as “the bored custodians of peace” (IC98). Peacekeepers who embraced boredom relied on three practices: (a) situational adjustment of moral values, (b) redefining the meaning of the idealized future, and (c) anchoring the temporal orientation in the present reality.

*Situational adjustment of moral values.* Although peacekeepers who embraced boredom stressed that moral values are “essential in this line of work” (I50), they admitted that their moral values “needed an update” (D51, Phase III) in conversations during the field visit, private reflections in their diaries, and interviews. Peacekeepers candidly described how the context of war necessitates “a different set of moral values” (I48), and a “move away from the United Nations headquarters, New York City high horse of moral imperative” (I61). Peacekeepers described how being in close proximity to active combat with cruel rebel fractions and working in contexts with resource scarcity had prompted them to “loosen” their moral standards (I50):

It’s moral in the rough. Our [moral] standards are whatever fits the situation on the ground. [...] Keeping the moral values as they were back at home is impossible. We deal with corrupt governmental players and rebel groups with no playbook or rules.. [...] Corruption is bad, but then if I don’t give them a little bit, they [rebels] don’t give me access [to their villages]. What I’m supposed to do? Stretching our playbook is the only possibility. Not in line with our moral code book but look fucking around here, nobody gives a rat’s ass for moral standards. (D37, Phase III)

Peacekeepers frequently adjusted their moral standards, for example, when choosing to engage with corrupt local politicians or violent rebel groups (IC54). Often these adjustments were necessary in situations involving weapons, force, justice, etc. For example, an experienced peacekeeper at UN headquarters in New York shared how he “converted from a believer to a less-

believer” in the utility of a static moral code in the field using the example of a known warlord who has committed hundreds of atrocities while “living in plain sight:”

ICC [International Criminal Court] warrant for [warlord] is out. ICC is looking for him for years. We all know where he lives. We know that he goes on Sundays to play tennis in the only half-decent tennis court in the city. We even talk with him. But we [know] and he knows: he is untouchable. So, what does that say about our morals? (I61)

***Redefining the meaning of the idealized future.*** Peacekeepers who embraced boredom described how they revisited the meaning of the idealized future, including mission assignments and their roles. Peacekeepers often admitted that their original conceptualization of the idealized future “has no warrant in the actual field” (I48) and is a “Hollywood version of peace and life” (I51). Peacekeepers described themselves as “updating our end goal” (I47) in light of experiences in the field: “I came to the realization that boredom is part of the work. It’s a good thing. Boredom is a positive thing [for lasting peace]. It means no bombs are going off. We can just walk around and be present” (D47, Phase IV).

These peacekeepers had redefined the idealized future they were enacting from a “total state of peace” (I33) to “partial peace” (D54, Phase IV) and “peacekeeping” on the ground. For example, workers started to make distinctions in their work between *peacekeeping*, i.e., “physically standing between two different groups” (ID42) and *peacebuilding*, i.e., achieving enduring peace for a specific society or country. “We are here to keep people from attacking each other. We are the physical barrier between the different parties. This is the first or second step towards peace. Peace is a long way from here” (D51, Phase IV). Similarly, another peacekeeper reflected on the word “peace” and its ascribed purpose: “There is no absolute peace. There is no absolute truth. There is just peace in the moment. We are here to make sure the truth in that peace of moment lasts another day. Survives another night” (D44, Phase III).

Others stressed that outreach had become a new way of enacting the idealized future. For example, one peacekeeper recalled a conversation with a local politician who used to be a well-known fighter for a notorious rebel in recent decades.

Peacekeeping is outreach to people. We try to help them to return to normal life. Of course, we shouldn't be blind to assume that some of the people we are working with have done stuff that are super questionable. But it is not me to judge. Peace means we get them to talk, to interact, to have tolerance. I'm happy if we get previous fighters to talk instead of picking up a weapon. One conversation at a time. The goal is to observe them talking. I don't care if they have a heated conversation like politicians do, but we need them to use words and not guns. (I52)

As part of redefining the meaning and embracing boredom, peacekeepers draw on examples such as mobile courts, which have been installed in some missions, given the lack of accessibility to a working justice system in many parts of the country. A peacekeeper in South Sudan described:

Today, we traveled to [small village area] to help with the mobile justice court. Work was pretty standard, lots of standing around and waiting. [...] It's so important that civilians know we are taking the judiciary system seriously just by our presence. [...] Not everyone gets access but at least some is better than none that can make use of the mobile court. (D40, Phase IV)

In other words, “standing around and waiting” helped with bringing formal justice closer to locations lacking access to formal legal system, which otherwise often relied on customary courts with ambiguous outcomes (D580). While chatting over beers at a popular local bar in Geneva, a peacemaker who had recently returned from a 6-month assignment in Goma (MONUSCO) shared: “Peace is an abstract concept. Peace means whatever you want it to mean” (FN141) and “Peace is not what is written on paper in New York but what you make out of it in the situation on the ground.” (I39)

*Anchoring the temporal orientation in the present reality.* Peacekeepers who embraced boredom described how they moved away from their “previous” understanding of the idealized future to an understanding “grounded in the present day” (D51, Phase III) of peace as much more “context-specific” and “situational” (I56). In turn, these peacekeepers reframed the temporal orientation of their work by focusing on the “here and now” (I45). For example, they focused on

empowering local authorities and women by training them on topics such as gender-based violence and domestic abuse (I69), which are persistent issues in South Sudan and many other areas with peacekeeping missions. Reflecting this temporal shift, one peacekeeper contended that “thinking about South Sudan in 2040 and peace is non-sensical” (D50, Phase IV):

Peace is made in the present. The locals, they don't think of tomorrow. They don't play the long game. They live today. They spend the money they earned today. They don't save. God will deal with tomorrow's worries. If they shall live another day, he will take care of tomorrow's problems. They don't trust the promise of tomorrow. It is all about today. We need to keep today quiet [maintain the ceasefire] to have a tomorrow. (D50, Phase IV)

Peacekeepers moved away from settling differences or engaging in lasting peacebuilding efforts by focusing on mundane peacekeeping “in the very moment.” For example, they limited police forces to five rounds of bullets to prevent former fighters from selling ammunition on the black market (I60). Others described their how they changed their approach to patrolling, describing interactions with locals to identify how peacekeeping can best serve their needs. For example, a peacekeeper reflected in his diary:

Instead of asking what do you hope for in the future, I started to ask them what do you need today? A simple small question. A local guy mentioned in passing that they struggle to get pen and paper. [...] Back in the camp with a colleague, we raided our office supply stock. He took for sure 50 pens, and I took the others. (D48; Phase IV)

The diarist pointed out in the follow up interview that he made a habit to be always “well stocked” with pens when patrolling, “People of all age love small gifts. Children love pens.” (I48)

### **Boredom-induced adherence**

Although all peacekeepers engaged in similar activities and tasks, they had some agency and latitude over how they enacted the idealized future. Rather than embracing boredom and making adjustments accordingly, 21 of 63 peacekeepers in our sample renounced boredom, stating that it “categorically *cannot* be part of work” (D21, Phase III, emphasis added) and that “peace is too important to be bored at work” (I10). Some diarists even went so far as to say: “If I feel bored,

I shouldn't get my salary" (D4, Phase II). Interestingly, these peacekeepers said that they did not mind repetitive tasks, as most had performed routine-based police work in their home countries.

I don't feel entitled to do fancy work. I love writing speeding tickets at home. Definitely not sexy, and most colleagues hated it because it's boring. But here we are on a mission to create change, to create a future, but instead we patrol and patrol. (I20)

Peacekeepers in this group described boredom as particularly frustrating and linked it to a lack of progress in the peace process which should enable host countries to achieve complete independence and become fully functioning democracies with effective legislative, executive, and judicial branches. As "standing around" was "not an option" (I1), peacekeepers engaged in boredom-induced adherence by (a) clinging to moral values, (b) maintaining the meaning of the idealized future, and (c) anchoring the temporal orientation of their work in the idealized future.

*Clinging to moral values.* Peacekeepers who renounced boredom pointed to the UN Charter and the mission-specific mandate to underscore the importance of "moral clarity that is not to be debated" (I10) and "moral standards that are set in stone" (D8, Phase III) when enacting their work. Diarists pointed out that embracing boredom would unravel the "very fabric of what the UN stands for" (I11) and be unfair to civilians in peril:

It's violating the very basic UN principles. [...]. We are not the Sandra Bullocks of the world in a beauty contest wishing for world peace for a beauty contest crown. We are the UN peacekeeping operations. We bring the change. We are the change. (D20, Phase III)

One peacekeeper emphasized the importance of moral values and voiced concerns about the severe consequences of deviating from the UN's "moral handbook," not only for peacekeeping, but for society at large: "We walk through villages in our uniforms. With our blue colors. We symbolize peace. We stand for a future. ... Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES we can fold. Our principles are not up for negotiation" (D17, Phase III; emphasis in original).

Others shared similar sentiments, some going as far as stating, "We are no private military contractors like the Wagner group up for hire with flexible morals" (I18). However, adhering to

their moral compass was not without its challenges. One peacekeeper said it could be challenging “to remain loyal to our moral values, objectives and the goals of the mission mandate” (I10). He elaborated using the example of building a functioning justice system in a developing country:

There is no running water or electricity. Why should there be a court? ... Question is always what to do with all the rapists and murderers? Our Western answer is jail time in a maximum prison. Things become a little complicated here. Houses don't even have proper doors here. Worse, the legitimate sentence for such transgressions was the death sentence, which is directly in violation with the UN Charter and our [emphasized] moral codes. [...] the UN couldn't build a facility to kill people under our watch in this capacity. (I10)

Efforts to establish a functioning court system by training lawyers, building a jail and a courthouse, and educating correctional officers were “put on hold because we had there a problem of moral sorts—who and how should the execution in the literal sense be happening. [...] This required sending this decision up the food chain [hierarchy] to think holistically about ways how to hold up our highest moral standards and respect the environment of the host country.” (I21)

*Maintaining the meaning of the idealized future.* Peacekeepers focused on maintaining the meaning of the idealized future, making statements such as “there is no alternative to peace” (I08) and “peace or bust” (D5, Phase III), thereby reinforcing perceptions of misalignment with their day-to-day work. During the fieldwork in South Sudan, a peacekeeper stood around yawning and playing with a pocketknife, waiting for his next patrol to start. Unprompted, he said: “All of my inner guts hate it so much, this waiting for something to happen. Same thing every day” (FN98). He began to elaborate but struggled to find the right words. He left abruptly and instructed the researcher to wait. After five minutes, he came back from his quarters with a stack of paper, which appeared to be training manuals for his mission in South Sudan. He pointed to a sentence stating: “The peacekeeping mandate is both of political and moral nature.” After pointing to underlined text highlighting the role of moral values, he continued:

Why should I come here not to follow the moral character of our mission? We have no other choice. This [gestures toward the pile of paper] is why we are here, how we are supposed to behave and

what are going to accomplish. Peace is far away from this place, but there is no alternative to peace. We need to do more and not less. (FN98)

Another cornerstone in maintaining the meaning of the idealized was often exemplified by discussing in relation to the Protection of Civilians (POC), which is the central part of many missions' mandates (D134). Peacekeepers in this group took this responsibility very serious. The discussion about POC often came up in situations when their mandate was extended by supervisors or other officials for other purposes. For example, in some instances the “protection of civilians” mandate came to include the “protection of cattle” (I19). According to UN officials, the value of livestock in countries like Ethiopia, Mali, and South Sudan is not only economic, but symbolic, as animals are used in ceremonies and to formalize social relationships such as marriage (e.g., as part of dowries). For example, a peacekeepers illustrates such extension:

This is ridiculous. I travel half of the world to watch cattle? ... Colonel [redacted] has ordered that cattle raiding falls inside the nexus of our protection. ... I get observing maybe dancing and whatever other stuff. But cattle? Fucking goats. The UN is sending billion USD inside this place for me playing shepherd? [...] I can't square peace and us watching a bunch of cows is in line with our mission of establishing peace here. (D3, Phase IV)

Indeed, many peacekeepers perceived their work focus shall be instead on the most important goal in many current peacekeeping mandates, i.e., “The protection of civilians mandate is a priority mandate, pursuant to Security Council resolutions.” (ID65). Peacekeepers who renounced boredom regarded *peacekeeping* “as the little sister and first step in *peacebuilding*” (I69, emphasis added), which they viewed as their true purpose.

***Anchoring the temporal orientation in the idealized future.*** Peacekeepers who renounced boredom often focused on the purpose of their mission as “the state of peace here and now and the future” (D1, Phase III). As peacekeepers adhered to their understanding of the idealized future prior to their deployment, they insisted on “no compromises when it comes to peace” and prioritized peacebuilding over “quick and dirty results” (I11). In the language of peacekeepers,

such distinctions make significant differences given that *peacekeeping* refers solely to separating two warring parties, while *peacebuilding* refers to establishing “100% peace” over the long term (D2, Phase I). From their perspective, focusing solely on peacekeeping was unacceptable: “in our day to day work we need to push boundaries for real peace” (D2; Phase IV).

One must realize peace is far away. Peace is just at the very beginning [in South Sudan] and a long way to go. We are there to be those long-term peacebuilding partners. We are the ones that help normalize the situation. We cannot be happy with just keeping the peace; we have to push for *peacebuilding*. (I03, emphasis by the informant)

Thus, those who renounced boredom continued to anchor the temporal orientation of their work in the idealized future: “Peace in this godforsaken place is light-years away” (D6, Phase IV).

During an interview, this peacekeeper elaborated:

Peace is the ultimate goal. Peace is what motivates us, what brings us here. It is what drives us. There is no compromise on peace. What I meant to say with peace is light-years away is that in places like Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, peace takes time. We need to build peace one brick at a time. It is painfully slow and tedious. Peace has no switch. Peace has to be built. Everyone that tells you differently is a lunatic. Peace is in the future. Peace is the future, but the future is far away. (I6)

### **Organizational Implications of Boredom**

Peacekeepers in the two groups adopted starkly different approaches to existential boredom and the disconnect between the idealized future and the mundane realities of peacekeeping work.

*Pragmatic idealized future.* Peacekeepers who embraced boredom were able to cast their experiences in a positive light and find “peace with being bored at work” (D36, Phase IV). They pursued what I call a *pragmatic* idealized future, reframing boredom as a source of contentment as they performed mostly routine tasks: “Walking around bored means we are doing things right.” (D52, Phase IV). This pattern was evident in interviews and email exchanges after their assignments had ended, as these peacekeepers described greater satisfaction and hope for the future than those who renounced boredom. In other words, embracing boredom as part of their work

enabled peacekeepers to shift the temporal orientation of their work to the present and focus on the peace process, thereby aligning the realities of their work with the idealized future.

Reframing their experiences of boredom from negative (e.g., “It is too quiet, and nothing is happening;” D31, Phase II) to positive (e.g., “It’s great nothing is happening;” D40, Phase IV) had important organizational implications. To enact the future, peacekeepers often build essential infrastructure, such as radio stations, to promote peace and dispel fake news and misinformation campaigns, which are often used by rival groups to slow down the peace process. Peacekeepers who embraced boredom were much more willing to participate in what they described as “unusual work assignments.” Two quotes from the same diary show this transformation from the beginning to the end of a peacekeeper’s deployment: “Am now in charge of installing a radio station? What does a radio station have to do with peacekeeping” [D50, Phase I] vs. “Impartial news [outlets] are a cornerstone of peace” (D50, Phase IV). Indeed, another peacekeeper who embraced boredom described Radio Mariya in South Sudan and Radio Jamana in Mali as prototypes of “impact” (D28, Phase IV). These peacekeepers could see how their idealized future was taking shape despite the many adverse circumstances, such as continuous violations of ceasefire agreements and human rights (ID190). Peacekeepers who embraced boredom described such measures as particularly valuable because less than 30% of the population is literate in many host countries: “We need to act [so] that peace is possible and radio is one way of doing so” (D35, Phase V).

Peacekeepers in this group described many activities as winning “hearts and minds” (ID591). Such efforts are tailored to regional needs, ranging from educating locals on basic healthcare (e.g., wound infection) to planting onions for future harvests (ID102) and other “creative” work assignments that only indirectly relate to peacemaking at first glance. For example, peacekeepers treated more than 1,700 animals (e.g., goats, cattle, sheep) for a range of

diseases and raised awareness on animal health at free veterinary camps in Malakal in the Upper Nile. “Peace starts with empowering the local community” (O29).

Peacekeepers who embraced boredom even described feelings of pride in their work. One peacekeeper working in the outskirts of the capital of Mali observed how their presence through repetitive patrolling allowed for the reemergence of civilian life and normalcy:

Seeing us every day, they feel calmer, more confident for their future, they start to have dreams again, built their roots again after years on the run, start open their small businesses and shops again, one hut after another. A barber shop next to a guy selling vegetables. ... It’s like a chain reaction. We change from war to peace shop by shop. ... Proud moment to see this barber shop opening. I’ll be the first white guy they will cut the facial hair. (D29, Phase IV)

In an informal conversation during a bus ride in South Sudan, a peacekeeper disclosed how she overcame boredom and developed a sense of pride in her work:

It might sound very surprising but I’m proud to be a female here. ...I can reach out to other local females. I can drop hints casually here and there to educate them on topics of female hygiene, basic medical treatments, and the importance of democracy and education. Often, I just sit with them and show them pictures of food that I bake at home, pictures of my child’s first day at school and other mundane aspects of my life. This is my way of empowering locals. (FN62)

Overall, peacekeepers who embraced boredom reframed the misalignment between their work realities and the idealized future to “make it work in the context” (I31). This facilitated the adoption of work practices that were not seen as aligned with the idealized future in earlier phases. Overall, these workers had developed a much more context-specific understanding of peacekeeping as they enacted a pragmatic idealized future: “Peace has to be practical. This means if we wait for peace to keep peace, doesn’t threaten my manhood nor my moral convictions” (I40).

***Absolute idealized future.*** In contrast, peacekeepers who renounced boredom were less willing to accept and adapt to the realities of peacekeeping activities, and struggled as they attempted to enact what I call an *absolute* idealized future. They became increasingly frustrated and pessimistic over time, and ultimately were “highly displeased with the work” (D17, Phase IV), having experienced what an official UN coordinator described as the “slow death of idealism”

(I63). Amplifying the misalignment between the realities of work and the idealized future elicited strong emotional reactions, particularly to work assignments they interpreted as being “outside the mandate” (I11) and tailored to regional peculiarities, such as protecting cattle and attending local religious gatherings. When prompted in meetings by senior team leaders to come up with creative ways to enact their idealized future, e.g., in contact with civilians and support the peacekeeping process, peacekeepers often refused, focusing instead on their negative emotions and many problems with the mandate and missions, such as a lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption.

This [work] is all pointless. We can pour another 100 billion USD in this place [South Sudan] and there still will be no peace in 2035. ... We can't neglect our commitment to our principles just because this is a lawless place here. We cannot alter our work because we cannot compromise our [moral] standards. (D12, Phase IV)

Another peacekeeper reflected on the lack of democratic structures, despite frequent promises and efforts to hold the first general elections in South Sudan:

We are about to end our mission here [South Sudan]. Again, no general election happened. They should have happened first in 2015, then in 2018, and now postponed to 2021. It should have been the first general election since its independence. Instead, we had a coup, entire cabinet was dismissed and we step into dictatorship. We had more civil war than before, still no constitutional convention and nowhere close to a constitution here. ... We are bored. [...]. We can see here [South Sudan] we cannot make any compromises on our work and commitment to peace. Those people will never change their mindsets if we just give money and watch. They will fuck us left and right like they do now. (D9; Phase IV)

Peacekeepers who renounced boredom expressed “disgust” at the idea of lowering their moral standards, yet they were very clear in both their diaries and interviews that they were not willing to accept a “lower version of peace.” Unlike findings in other extreme contexts (de Rond & Lok, 2016), this was not attributable to disillusionment or a lack of impact, but to a fundamental disconnect between the work and the idealized future:

Today most random of all past months. Boss asked who plays soccer. [I] thought first they want to do some team-building or what not. Turns out boss wants a group of us [peacekeepers] to play against locals. Like what? What is the connection to peacebuilding even remotely. Cattle is absurd but soccer? They are out of their [minds]. (D03; Phase IV)

The diarist, who was stationed in Goma, the capital of the North Kivu province in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) reflected on this request to play soccer across a dozen pages:

At the end of the day, whoever is the Under-Secretary-General right now, it's the same. World is divided more than ever. We need to unite and engage yada yada yada. They always say the same but then soccer playing is the solution to all the world's problem? Ignoring even that female[s] in this country are not even remotely allowed to play soccer? ... I get that peacebuilding is a resource tense and long process but dear United Nations seniors [executives], you need to come up with something more substantive. We need to find routines and work that is impactful that is ACTUALLY creating change and not this ridiculous wanna-be-cool-but-actually-just-a-making-a-joke-of-us stuff like soccer, planting trees or whatever other fart of the week. (D03; Phase IV; emphasis in original diary)

Many workers thwarted the adoption of work practices which they perceived as “not up the task” (I13) of peacebuilding and continued to adhere to the idealized future despite admitting that “peace feels even more distant than it used to be” (D01; Phase IV). Workers in this group expressed to their superiors and fellow peacekeepers that they were not willing to engage in such work practices and deemed them “pointless” (ID03) and “waste of money” (ID05). For example, a peacekeeper reflects in his diary from a patrol where they had been encouraged to advocate for vaccinations: “What does some vaccine for some fever have to do with establishing lasting peace here?” Me playing missionary for the US pharma industry is not in line with my understanding of bringing peace.” (D8; Phase IV)

While I did not perform any quantitative analysis, information gleaned from conversations, follow-ups and diaries suggests that those who embraced boredom as part of their work were more likely to sign up for additional peacekeeping missions (28.5%) and continued working in law enforcement in their home countries (92%). In contrast, among peacekeepers who renounced boredom, only one person had signed up for another peacekeeping mission (12%) and only 14 had remained in law enforcement (67%). While this sample is not representative, and other

explanations for these differences are possible (e.g., resilience, family obligations, etc.), these patterns seem to suggest that responses to boredom at work mediate the relationship between mundane work realities in the present and the enactment of idealized futures (see Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

Drawing on a study of UN peacekeepers, I have shown how workers enact idealized futures in extreme contexts. The peacekeepers in this study faced existential boredom associated with a misalignment between their mundane daily work and the idealized future of achieving peace. Drawing on this findings, I derive a theoretical model that unveils the important but underspecified role of existential boredom in enacting idealized futures (Figure 1).

### **Theoretical Model: How Boredom Shapes the Enactment of Idealized Futures**

This model highlights that in extreme contexts, enacting an idealized future requires workers to reconcile their expectations with mundane work realities. Workers either embrace or renounce boredom, and thus take different pathways reflecting either boredom-led adjustments or adherence to morals, the meaning of the idealized future, and the temporal orientation. These contrasting approaches shape the enactment of either a pragmatic or an absolute idealized future, with implications for the adoption of new practices in organizations.

---- Insert Figure 1 about here ----

The left side of the model illustrates how workers' enactment of an idealized future is at odds with the realities of work in extreme contexts. This misalignment leads to *existential* boredom. Distinct from idleness or situational boredom (de Rond 2017; Johnsen, 2022), existential boredom refers to a situation in which workers perceive their work as having little or no value and meaning. This is an important extension of the boredom literature (Barbalet, 1999; Fisher, 1993), which predominantly focuses on the negative consequences of *situational* boredom, i.e., being

bored by work tasks, such as working on shop floors or waiting for patients, or having little to do outside of work (Roy, 1959; de Rond, 2017). This is distinct from work that lacks perceived meaning (e.g., patrolling in a risky area). As Nietzsche (1878) famously wrote: “The boredom of God on the seventh day of creation would be a subject for a great poet.” Nietzsche was clearly pointing to situational boredom (i.e., a lack of things to do) rather than existential boredom (i.e., a lack of meaning and questioning of purpose). In other words, the experience of existential boredom challenges workers’ sense of meaning and purpose.

Existing scholarship suggests that such misalignment should trigger organizations to resolve inconsistencies by adopting different time management practices (Lupa & Rokka, 2022; Perlow, 1999) or engaging in job crafting (Harju et al., 2016; Vogel et al., 2016) to counteract the negative experience of boredom (Fisher, 1999; Kent & Granqvist, forthcoming). However, such adaptation is challenging in organizations that pursue grand visions or idealized futures in which they have successfully established peace, eradicated famine, or mitigated climate change. For such organizations, resolving inconsistencies is far from straightforward, given the multiplex and deep-seated issues at play that cannot be resolved by job crafting or better time management.

The middle of Figure 1 illustrates different responses to existential boredom. Workers who embrace boredom follow a pathway of boredom-induced adjustments, whereas workers who renounce boredom follow a pathway of boredom-induced adherence. Workers who follow the pathway of adjustment engage in situationally updating their moral values, redefine the meaning of the idealized future, and anchor the temporal orientation of their work in the present reality. Through these practices, they enact a *pragmatic* idealized future aligned with the present circumstances. Pursuing feasible and realistic outcomes rather than theoretical ideals and aspirations facilitates the adoption of new organizational practices. Accepting that espoused moral

values may not be achievable in their work reality enables workers to find meaning and purpose in their work and generate positive emotional energy (Collins, 2004). In contrast, workers who follow the pathway of adherence cling to their moral values, maintain the meaning of the idealized future, and anchor the temporal orientation of their work in the idealized future. Through these practices, they enact an *absolute* idealized future that intensifies the misalignment with realities on the ground. Their pursuit of the best theoretical outcomes irrespective of the context and circumstances is rooted in the romantic notion that a potential utopian state can be achieved in the distant future (Hernes & Schultz, 2020), and thwarts the adoption of new organizational practices. Given the contrast between the idealized future and the present situation, morale decreases, and negative emotional energy (Collins, 2004) becomes dominant as feelings of frustration, shame, and guilt (Haidt, 2003) intensify. Although I did not rigorously analyze organizational retention, general patterns in the data suggest that those who follow the pathway of adherence are more likely to leave, whereas those who pursue the pathway of adjustment tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction and retention.

### **Theoretical Implications for the Literature on Futures**

My study advances the literature on futures by revealing how workers enact an idealized future. To date, scholars who study futures have focused on practices and tools used to explore and imagine the future (e.g., Augustine et al., 2019; Comi & Whyte, 2018; Wenzel et al., 2020). My work contributes to this literature by shifting the focus to enactment and exploring how an idealized vision of “what should happen” (Rindova & Martins, 2022: 216) shapes workers’ behavior and expectations. I contribute to the literature on futures by introducing the notion of *idealized futures*—visions of how the world is imagined to be, grounded in strong moral belief.

By unpacking how workers enact idealized futures while navigating mundane work realities, I reveal how the meaning and morality associated to idealized futures underpin their enactment.

Prior research has studied desired futures (e.g., Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022; Comi & Whyte, 2018) and contested futures (e.g., Alimadadi et al., 2022), this case reveals how workers may enact idealized futures in different ways. I advance the literature on futures by advancing the conversations on how futures are conceptualized (e.g., see Comi & Whyte 2018 for an overview). Doing so, I reveal two key mechanisms to deal with the misalignment between idealized futures and mundane realities that lead to existential boredom: boredom-induced *adjustments* and *boredom-induced* adherence leading to different futures to be enacted, i.e., a *pragmatic or absolute* idealized future. I highlight the roles of practices related to morals, meaning, and temporal orientation in enacting futures. My findings point to the important role of differences in workers' engagement with idealized futures, whether those futures are near or distant (Bansal et al., 2020; Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022). I contribute by showing how organizational members may reframe their temporal orientation by anchoring it in either in the present or idealized distant future (Hernes & Schultz, 2020). Doing so, I highlight the importance of focusing on and further examining different types of futures (e.g., idealized, desired, promissory etc.) and potentially competing demands regarding their plausibility and visibility.

By focusing on the role of morality attached to futures, I advance current understandings in the future literature (e.g., Van Elk et al., forthcoming). In their conceptual piece, Whyte et al. (2023: 7) emphasize their importance: “We know that judgment about which futures are preferred and enacted by organizations are also ethical in nature, based in morality.” However, we know much less about how morality plays a role in enacting and imagining futures. In a notable exception, Van Elk and colleagues (forthcoming) investigate how future projections are mobilized

to shape moral struggles to resolve today's intractable moral dilemmas studying a recent UK healthcare austerity, which they term promissory futures. My findings illustrate that those who situationally adjust their moral values also anchor their temporal orientation in the present reality, and redefine the meaning of the idealized future. While the others, cling to their morals, maintaining the meaning of the idealized future and anchoring their temporal orientation in the distant future. Doing so, I advance the future literature by illustrating how moral values and temporal orientation are directly connected.

Prior research on futures often has focused on the challenges in imagining futures (Almidadi et al., 2022; Augustine et al., 2019). Moving beyond imagining possible futures, I highlight the role of mundane work realities when enacting an idealized future beyond typical project work and strategic change initiatives (e.g., Alimadadi et al., 2022). In previous work, Pettit et al. (2023) showed how shaping intentions guide future-making cycles of imagining and adapting to move from an abstract vision to ways of working. My findings reveal similarities between idealized futures and shaping intentions. However, they go a step further by showing how they evoke heterogenous responses among workers. I illustrate how one group of workers was able to adjust their future-making cycles while another group remained stuck on a "fixed" understanding of enacting futures. These findings point to important differences among professionals.

### **Theoretical Implications for Literature on Workplace Boredom in Extreme Contexts**

By identifying and explicating the important role of existential boredom, I advance work that has typically focused on the negative and destructive nature of situational or task-related boredom (Game, 2007; Loukidou et al., 2009). Studies have emphasized that boredom emerges in episodes with "no foreseeable denouement" (Darden, 1999: 18) as individuals subjectively perceive time as slowing down or standing still (Barbalet, 1999). I suggest that boredom can be

constructed and actively manipulated to align or contrast with an organization's purpose and idealized future.

My findings show that workers address existential boredom by either embracing or renouncing it. I highlight the agentic role of highly motivated workers who "face" boredom associated with a perceived lack of connection between mundane work tasks and the idealized future. A few scholars have begun to examine the bright side of boredom, describing it as a source of creativity, innovation, and novelty that acts as an "impetus for achievement" (Spacks, 1995: 2; Johnsen, 2016). I advance this work by shifting the focus away from creative tasks and innovation processes (Carroll et al., 2010; Johnsen, 2016) and providing evidence that boredom can prompt workers to reframe the meaning of work to align their mundane work tasks with an idealized future.

The literature on boredom is largely based on the assumption that boredom signifies a "lack of meaning" (Danckert & Eastwood, 2020). Challenging this assumption, my findings show that although workers may be bored by the tasks at hand, some find ways to infuse them with meaning. I thus challenge the predominant portrayal of boredom as simply a lack of meaning or having too much time on one's hands, or what Roy (1959: 158) called the "beast of monotony." I show that those who embraced existential boredom and followed the pathway of adjustment perceived the activity of waiting positively. The pathway of adjustment connects with insights that hope "enacts the future as open to difference" (Anderson, 2006: 734) and "open[s] up a world beyond the given, beyond who 'we' are" (Colebrook, 2010: 324).

In prior studies of extreme contexts, Hällgren et al. (2018: 141) raised an important question: "Are there more, and less, effective ways of managing boredom?" Prior work has suggested that workers prefer "constant" action to avoid reflection and introspection when confronted with boredom (de Rond, 2017) and prefer to "ignore and overwrite" (Rauch & Ansari,

2022: 25) feelings that arise. “Emotions are treated as a mere distraction that only get in the way of their attempts to decisively resolve a crisis” (Kalkman, 2023: 52). In contrast, I have shown that boredom is regulated differently from other emotions in extreme contexts. That is, rather than conceal their emotions, workers openly express their frustration and negative emotions when facing boredom.

My findings deviate from what de Rond (2017: 77) identified in his ethnography of military medics as the underlying reasons for boredom and how to overcome it: “with little or nothing else to preoccupy them, some doctors tried to create work for themselves or began to compete for new work.” I add to this discussion by highlighting that peacekeepers did not dread opportunities to reflect on their work or seek distractions to avoid existential boredom. Quite the opposite, as boredom was connected to their idealized future, and the deeply rooted morals and meanings associated with work and the goals they intended to accomplish. I suggest that boredom does not inherently lead to a sense of disillusionment and futility (de Rond & Lok, 2016; Rauch & Ansari, 2022). Rather, boredom can catalyze adjustments to the meaning and morality attached to futures, thereby generating a sense of pride and accomplishment.

My findings on boredom have important organizational implications. I have revealed a different rationale for experiencing boredom, highlighting that organizations need to identify the root causes of the boredom workers experience. Boredom is also relevant in less extreme contexts. For example, educators might experience boredom as they deliver the same content year after year (e.g., introducing algebra to seventh graders) and may feel less impactful on their students than they had hoped. In response, they might seek new teaching methods or additional responsibilities to regain a sense of purpose and engagement. These examples illustrate how workers in different roles experience and respond to boredom. My findings demonstrate that workers’ responses to

boredom vary, and emphasize the importance of aligning the meaning of their work with the root causes of their boredom.

### **Boundary Conditions and Opportunities for Future Research**

My study has several important boundary conditions that highlight potential research opportunities. First, this paper is limited by access to diaries, observations, interviews, and the context of work. While I had access to diaries from people with different socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, and other demographics, I refrained from analyzing those characteristics to protect their anonymity (e.g., individual traits related to resilience). The diaries cover periods from 2.5 to 9 years; as political situations and work contexts evolve, so may the thinking of actors and organizations (e.g., the 2023 influx of refugees to South Sudan). I have also solely compared the diarists' experience on their first mission while in situ during missions. However, I did not analyze their reflections, e.g., on moral values, after returning to their home countries, which might significantly change their perceptions, which warrants future research. Although the work of UN peacekeepers is rather unique and the fact that workers experienced a strong calling to create change, I believe their experiences may resonate with the challenges confronted by other frontline workers, particularly in extreme work contexts. It would also be interesting to see how these findings connect to employee disengagement in less extreme contexts, such as in organizational CSR initiatives (Hahn, Sharma & Glavas, 2022), and zooming further into the drivers of boredom.

Second, while I have focused primarily on boredom, future research could study a larger set of emotions. This findings have hinted at work-related anger, frustration and contentment, additional research is needed. For example, it would be interesting to explore the interplay of deriving meaning and pride from the mundane task of standing guard for long hours. Future research could build on this existing knowledge by further explaining cross-occupational

differences in workers' responses to existential and situational boredom in both traditional and less traditional settings. Technology also seems to play an important role as an antecedent and cause of boredom. Recent findings show that "AI performs repetitive, well-codified work with greater reliability and consistency than human workers" (Jia et al., 2023: 5), raising questions of how technology will positively or negatively influence the experience of existential boredom.

## **CONCLUSION**

War and peace are as old as humanity. As Aristotle astutely noted: "It is not enough to win a war: It is more important to organize the peace." The UN establishes peacekeeping missions to enact this idealized future. My analysis of 63 personal diaries written by UN peacekeepers working across different peacekeeping missions reveals how workers reconciled the gap between their idealized future and the mundane realities of their daily work. I have demonstrated how reframing boredom can empower workers to infuse their work with new meaning and approach it with a renewed sense of agency. These insights have important implications for theory and practice, emphasizing the need to understand and address the root causes of boredom in pursuit of idealized futures and grand visions.

## REFERENCES

- Adam, B. 2011. Wendell Bell and the sociology of the future: Challenges past, present and future. *Futures*, 43(6): 590-595.
- Anderson, B. 2006. Becoming and being hopeful: Towards a theory of affect. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24(5): 733–752.
- Alaszweski, A. 2006. *Using Diaries for Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Alimadadi, S., Davies, A., & Tell, F. 2022. A palace fit for the future: Desirability in temporal work. *Strategic Organization*, 20(1), 20-50.
- Augustine, G., Soderstrom, S., Milner, D., & Weber, K. 2019. Constructing a Distant Future: Imaginaries in Geoengineering. *Academy of Management Journal*. 62(6): 1930–60.
- Bailey, C., & Suddaby, R. 2023. When Time Falls Apart: Re-centring human time in organisations through the lived experience of waiting. *Organization Studies*, 44(7): 1033–1053.
- Balogun, J., Huff, A. S., & Johnson, P. 2003. Three responses to the methodological challenges of studying strategizing. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40: 197–225.
- Bansal, P., Reinecke, J., Suddaby, R. & Langley, A. 2022 Temporal work: the strategic organization of time. *Strategic Organization*, 20(1): 6-19.
- Barbalet, J. M. 1999. Boredom and social meaning. *British Journal of Sociology*, 50: 631–646.
- Beckert, J. 2013. Imagined futures: fictional expectations in the economy. *Theoretical Sociology*, 42: 219–240.
- Beckert, J. 2016. *Imagined futures: Fictional expectations and capitalist dynamics*. Harvard University Press.
- Beckert, J. 2021. The firm as an engine of imagination: Organizational prospection and the making of economic futures. *Organization Theory*, 2: 1-21.
- Beckert, J., & Bronk, R. 2018. *Uncertain futures: Imaginaries, narratives, and calculation in the economy*. Oxford University Press.
- Bengtsson, T.T. 2012. Boredom and action. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41(5): 526–553.
- Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. J. 1975. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences*. Wiley.
- Burgess, R. G. 1984. In the Field: *An Introduction to Field Research*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Butler N, Olaison L, Sliwa M, et al. 2011. Work, play, and boredom. *Ephemera*, 11(4): 329–335.
- Bruursema, K., Kessler, S. R., & Spector, P.E. 2011. Bored employees misbehaving: The relationship between boredom and counterproductive work behavior. *Work & Stress*, 25: 93–107.
- Carroll, B.J., Parker P., & Inkson, K. 2010. Evasion of boredom: An unexpected spur to leadership. *Human Relations*, 63(7): 1031–1049.
- Clarke, L. 2008. Possibilistic thinking: A new conceptual tool for thinking about extreme events. *Social Research*. 75:669–690.
- Comi, A., & Whyte, J. 2018. Future making and visual artefacts: An ethnographic study of a design project. *Organization Studies*, 39(8): 1055-1083.

- Conroy, S. A., Becker, W.J., & Menges, J. I. 2017. The meaning of my feelings depends on who I am: Work-related identifications shape emotion effects in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(3):1071-1093.
- Colebrook, C. 2010. Toxic feminism: Hope and hopelessness after feminism. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 14(4): 323–335.
- Collins, R. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press.
- Costas, J. & Kaerreman, D. 2016. The bored self in knowledge work. *Human Relations*, 69: 61-83.
- Danckert, J., & Eastwood, J. D. 2020. *Out of my skull: The psychology of boredom*. Harvard University Press
- Darden, D.K. 1999. Boredom: A socially disvalued emotion. *Sociological Spectrum*, 19(1): 13-37.
- de Rond, M. 2012. Soldier, surgeon, photographer, fly: Fieldwork beyond the comfort zone: *Strategic Organization*, 10: 256-262.
- de Rond, M., & J. Lok 2016. Some things can never be unseen: The role of context in psychological injury at war. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(6):1965–1993.
- de Rond, M. 2017. *Doctors at War: Life and Death in a Field Hospital*, Cornell University Press.
- DiBenigno, J. 2018 Anchored personalization in managing goal conflict between professional groups: The case of U.S. Army mental health care. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63: 526–569.
- Dries, N., Luyckx, J. & Rogiers, P. 2024. Imagining the (distant) future of work. *Academy of Management Discoveries*. doi:10.5465/amd.2022.0130.
- Farny, S., Kibler, E., & Down, S. 2018. Collective emotions in institutional creation work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(3)
- Flammer, C., & Bansal, P. 2017. Does a long-term orientation create value? Evidence from a regression discontinuity. *Strategic Management Journal*, 38: 1827–1847.
- Fisher, C. D. 1993. Boredom at work: A neglected concept. *Human Relations*, 46:395–417.
- Fraher, A., L. Branicki, & Grint, K., 2017 Mindfulness in action: Discovering how Navy SEALs build capacity for mindfulness in high-reliability organizations. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 3(3): 239–261.
- Game, A. M. 2007. Workplace boredom coping: Health, safety, and HR implications. *Personnel Review*, 36:701–721.
- Gümüşay, A.A., & Reinecke, J. 2022. Researching for Desirable Futures: From Real Utopias to Imagining Alternatives. *Journal of Management Studies*, 59(1): 236–242.
- Gümüşay, A. A., & Reinecke, J. 2024. Imagining Desirable Futures: A call for prospective theorizing with speculative rigour. *Organization Theory*, 5(1).
- Geiger, D., Danner-Schröder, A., & Kremser, W. 2021. Getting ahead of time – performing temporal boundaries to coordinate routines under temporal uncertainty. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 66: 220-264.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. 2008. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction.
- Grimes, M. G., & Vogus, T. J. 2021 Inconceivable! Possibilistic thinking and the sociocognitive underpinnings of entrepreneurial responses to grand challenges. *Organization Theory*, 2(2).

- Hahn, T., Sharma, G., & Glavas, A. 2022. Employee-CSR tensions: Drivers of employee (dis) engagement with contested CSR initiatives. *Journal of Management Studies*.
- Haidt, J. 2003. *The moral emotions. Handbook of affective sciences*. in eds RJ Davidson, KR Scherer, HH Goldsmith (Oxford Univ Press, Oxford), 852–870.
- Hällgren, M., Rouleau, L. & de Rond, M., 2018. A matter of life or death: How extreme context research matters for management and organization studies. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(1): 111–153.
- Harju, L. K., Hakanen, J. J., & Schaufeli, W. B. 2016. Can job crafting reduce job boredom and increase work engagement? A three-year cross-lagged panel study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 95: 11-20.
- Harris, J., J., & Segal, D., R. 1985. Observations from the Sinai: The Boredom Factor. *Armed Forces & Society*, 11(2): 235–48.
- Hetherington, T. 2010. *Infidel*. London, U.K.: Chris Bo
- Hernes, T., & Schultz, M. 2020. Translating the Distant into the Present: How Actors Address Distant Past and Future Events Through Situated Activity. *Organization Theory*, 1(1).
- Hitlin, S. & Vaisey, S. 2013. The new sociology of morality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39(1): 51–68.
- Johnsen, R. 2016. Boredom and Organization Studies. *Organization Studies*, 37(10):1403-15.
- Johnsen, R. 2022. “Busy idleness”: The active and moral dimension of boredom. *Organization*, 29(5): 806–815.
- Kahn, W. A. 2019. Dynamics and implications of distress organizing. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(5): 1471-1497.
- Kalkman, J.P. 2023. *Frontline Crisis Response: Operational Dilemmas in Emergency Services, Armed Forces, and Humanitarian Organizations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kent, D., & Granqvist, N. 2024. Chasing Storms: Temporal Work to Foster Group Engagement Under Uncertainty. *Academy of Management Journal*.
- Kornberger, M. 2013. Disciplining the Future: On Studying the Politics of Strategy. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 29(1): 104-107.
- Langley, A. 1999 Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4): 691–710.
- Levy, D. L., & Spicer, A. 2013. Contested imaginaries and the cultural political economy of climate change. *Organization*, 20(5), 659-678.
- Lieberman, N., & Trope, Y. 1998. The role of feasibility and desirability considerations in near and distant future decisions: A test of temporal construal theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 75: 5–18.
- Lindebaum, D., Vesa, M., & Den Hond, F. 2020. Insights from "the machine stops" to better understand rational assumptions in algorithmic decision making and its implications for organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 45(1): 247-263.
- Locke, K. 2001. *Grounded Theory in Management Research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Loukidou, L., Loan-Clarke, J., & Daniels, K. 2009. Boredom in the workplace: More than monotonous tasks. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(4): 381–405.
- Lord, R. G., Dinh, J. E., & Hoffman, E. L. 2015. A quantum approach to time and organizational change. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(2): 263–290.
- Lupu, I., & Rokka, J. 2022. “Feeling in Control”: Optimal Busyness and the Temporality of Organizational Controls. *Organization Science*, 33(4):1396-1422.

- Maeland, B., & Brunstad, P. O. 2009. *Enduring military boredom*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mische, A. 2009. Projects and possibilities: researching futures in action. *Sociological Forum*, 24: 694–704.
- Nietzsche, F. 1879. *Menschlich, Allzumenschliches*, translated by Helen Zimmern and Paul V. Cohn, Human, All-Too-Human, 2006.
- Park, G., Lim, B. C., & Oh, H. S. 2019. Why being bored might not be a bad thing after all. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 5(1): 78-92.
- Pettit, K. L., Balogun, J., & Bennett, M. 2023. Transforming Visions into Actions: Strategic change as a future-making process. *Organization Studies*, 44(11): 1775-1799.
- Perlow, L. A. 1999. The time famine: Towards a sociology of work time. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(1): 57–81.
- Pitsis, T.S., Clegg, S.R., Marosszeky, M., & Rura-Polley, T. 2003. Constructing the Olympic Dream: A Future Perfect Strategy of Project Management, *Organization Science*, 14(5): 574–590.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K., & Kaufmann, J. 2006. Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2): 235–262.
- Rao, H., & Greve, H.R. 2018. Disasters and community resilience: Spanish flu and the formation of retail cooperatives in Norway. *Academy of Management Journal*. 61(1): 5–25.
- Rauch, M., & Ansari, S. 2021. Diaries as a Methodological Innovation for Studying Grand Challenges. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*.
- Rauch, M., & Ansari, S. 2022. Waging War from Remote Cubicles: How Workers Cope with Technologies That Disrupt the Meaning and Morality of Their Work. *Organization Science*, 33(1): 83-104.
- Rauch, M., & Ansari, S. 2024. Reframing Silence as Purposeful: Emotions in Extreme Contexts. *Journal of Management Studies*.
- Reinecke, J., van Bommel, K. & Spicer, A. (2017). When orders of worth clash: Negotiating legitimacy in situations of moral multiplexity. In: Cloutier C, Gond J-P, Leca B (eds) *Justification, Evaluation and Critique in the Study of Organizations*. Emerald, 33–72.
- Rindova, V.P., & Martins, L.L. 2022. Futurescapes: Imagination and temporal reorganization in the design of strategic narratives. *Strategic Organization*, 20(1): 200–224.
- Roy, D. F. 1959. ‘Banana time’: Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization*, 18: 58–168.
- Schabram, K., & Maitlis, S. 2017. Negotiating the challenges of a calling: Emotion and enacted sensemaking in animal shelter work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2): 584–609.
- Sharma, G., Greco, A., Grewatsch, S., & Bansal, P. 2022. Cocreating forward: How managers and researchers can address wicked problems together. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 21(3): 350–368.
- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. 2012. A matter of time: The temporal perspectives of organizational responses to climate change. *Organization Studies*, 33:1537–1563.

- Slawinski, N., & Bansal, P. 2017. *The paradoxes of time in organizations*. In W. K. Smith, P. Jarzabkowski, M. W. Lewis, & A. Langley (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational paradox*: 373–392. London, U.K.: Oxford University Press.
- Shin, J. & Grant, A.M. 2019. Bored by Interest: How Intrinsic Motivation in One Task Can Reduce Performance on Other Tasks. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62: 415–436.
- Steinmetz, K.F., Schaefer, B.P., & Green, E.L., 2017. Anything but boring: A cultural criminological exploration of boredom. *Theoretical Criminology*, 21(3): 342-360.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. 1990. *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications.
- Suchman, M. C. 1995. Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3): 571–610.
- Teeger, C. 2023. (Not) Feeling the Past: Boredom as a Racialized Emotion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(1): 1-40.
- United Nations. 2018. Magnitude of big societal challenges: Near-impossible to grasp. Retrieved from [URL]
- United Nations. 2023. Fragility of peace, conflict, and violence of war: Global statistics. Retrieved from [URL]
- Thompson, N. A. 2018. Imagination and creativity in organizations. *Organization Studies*, 39: 229–250.
- Thompson, N.A., & Byrne, O. 2021. Imagining Futures: Theorizing the Practical Knowledge of Future-making. *Organization Studies*, 43 (2): 247–268.
- Toohey, P. 2011. *Boredom: A Lively History*. Yale University Press.
- van Elk, S., Reinecke, J., Ferlie, E., & Trenholm, S. forthcoming. Constructing promissory futures to defer moral scrutiny: the dilemma of healthcare austerity. *Human Relations*,
- van Hooff, M. L., M., & Van Hooff, E. A. J. 2014. Boredom at work: Proximal and distal consequences of affective work-related boredom. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 19:348–359.
- Vogel, R. M., Rodell, J. B., & Lynch, J. W. 2016. Engaged and productive misfits: How job crafting and leisure activity mitigate the negative effects of value incongruence. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(5): 1561-1584.
- Wenzel, M., Krämer, H., Koch, J., & Reckwitz, A. 2020. Future and organization studies: On the rediscovery of a problematic temporal category in organizations. *Organization Studies*, 41(10): 1441-1455.
- Wenzel, M. 2022. Taking the future more seriously: From corporate foresight to ‘future-making’. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 36 (2): 845–850.
- Whyte, J., Comi, A., & Mosca, L. 2022. Making futures that matter: Future making, online working and organizing remotely. *Organization Theory*, 3(1).
- Wright, E. O. 2010. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso.
- Wright, A. L., Meyer, A. D., Reay, T., & Staggs, J. 2021. Maintaining places of social inclusion: Ebola and the emergency department. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 66(1): 42-85.
- Wrzesniewski, A. 2003. *Finding Positive Meaning in Work*. In: Cameron, K.S., Dutton, J.E. and Quinn, R.E., Eds., *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.

**TABLE 1**  
**Overview of Data Sources**

Data type	Details	Use in the analysis
Diaries (63)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 63 personal diaries written by United Nations peacekeeping officers from different hierarchical levels, backgrounds and experiences, working on officially sanctioned UN peacekeeping missions.</li> <li>• 9 hand-written diaries were transcribed electronically.</li> <li>• The diaries were written voluntarily, not as part of a research project, and were not handed over to anybody else (including their employers), as they were personal and thus addressed many private matters not relating to the individuals' work (e.g., their family life and other events).</li> <li>• The diaries vary in style and in the degree of detail; they also vary in terms of how long they were kept, ranging from 31 months to 9 years of daily journaling.</li> <li>• All diaries were written in English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and trace work practices over time across different phases</li> <li>• Identify and trace enactment of idealized futures</li> <li>• Elicit workers' motivation and engagement with idealized futures and perceived boredom</li> </ul>
Interviews (69)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 62 interviews with diarists (1 diarist was unavailable)</li> <li>• 7 additional interviews (e.g., other roles within the UN peacekeeping apparatus, e.g., coordinators) with UN personnel whose diaries were not analyzed</li> <li>• 68 interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim; we took extensive notes during an interview with 1 peacekeeper who preferred not to be recorded.</li> <li>• 89.75 h of interviews</li> <li>• Note: To facilitate easier reading of the manuscript, we assigned interviews and diaries numbers from 1 to 63. Each informant was assigned a particular number, (e.g., 22), which then was used both for the interview (I22) and diary (D22).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and trace work practices over time across different phases.</li> <li>• Identify and trace enactment of idealized futures</li> <li>• Elicit workers' motivation and engagement with idealized futures and perceived boredom</li> <li>• Clarify questions after reading diaries several times</li> </ul>
Non-participant observations (397 h)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations of "daily activities" prior to and during deployment as part of the UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, which were recorded in detailed field notes (320 h)</li> <li>• Observations of informal gatherings, pre- and post-deployment, e.g., drinking at local bars, which were recorded in detailed field notes (45 h)</li> <li>• Observations of meetings at UN headquarters in Geneva and New York about peacekeeping missions (e.g., strategies, debriefings, lessons learned), also recorded in detailed field notes (32 h)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study peacekeepers' work realities in vivo</li> <li>• Analyze organizational factors affecting work and idealized future on field level</li> </ul>
Documents (1,896)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal documentation, including reports, summaries, and interim reports on and related to UN peacekeeping missions (711)</li> <li>• PowerPoint presentations delivered to various constituents (37)</li> <li>• Documentation provided by UN Peacekeeping to the public, such as briefings and peace treaties (890)</li> <li>• Documents for newly hired personnel, e.g., guidelines on how to behave in crises, situations involving conflict, etc. (82)</li> <li>• Pictures taken by UN peacekeepers shared with researchers (176)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze organizational factors affecting work and idealized futures on field level</li> </ul>

**TABLE 2**  
**Overview of Diarists**

#	Age range	Gender	Previous experience peacekeeping	Experience in police force (back home)	Joined another UN peacekeeping mission	Left law enforcement	Idealized future	Embracing (E)/renouncing (R) boredom	Mission location <sup>4</sup>	Motivation to join mission
1	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
2	35-44	Male	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
3	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
4	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	N/A	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
5	35-44	NB	No	N/A	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
6	35-44	Male	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Central Africa	Financial
7	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Middle East	Altruistic
8	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
9	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
10	25-34	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	R	Central Africa x2	Altruistic
11	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Financial
12	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
13	45-54	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
14	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Financial
15	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
16	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
17	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
18	N/A	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Europe	Personal
19	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Financial
20	45-54	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
21	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
22	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	R	Central Africa	Altruistic
23	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Financial
24	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Financial
25	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
26	35-44	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Central Africa x2	Financial
27	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
28	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
29	25-34	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa x2	Altruistic

<sup>4</sup> Central Africa (MONUSCO, MINUSCA; UNMISS), Eastern Africa (MINURSO; MINUSMA); Europe (UNFICYP; UNMIK); Middle East (UNIFIL; UNTSO; UNDOF)

30	N/A	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
31	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Financial
32	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Financial
33	45-54	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa x2	Financial
34	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
35	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
36	25-34	Male	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Africa; Africa	Altruistic
37	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Financial
38	25-34	Male	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
39	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	E	Middle East	Altruistic
40	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
41	25-34	Male	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
42	25-34	Male	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
43	35-44	Female	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Africa; Africa	Altruistic
44	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Financial
45	35-44	Male	No	N/A	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
46	45-54	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Africa; Africa	Altruistic
47	45-54	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Financial
48	25-34	Female	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa x2	Altruistic
49	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
50	45-54	Female	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
51	25-34	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Central Africa x2	Altruistic
52	25-34	Male	No	Yes	N/A	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Financial
53	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
54	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
55	25-34	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
56	35-44	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Central Africa x2	Altruistic
57	25-34	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	E	Central Africa x2	Altruistic
58	25-34	Female	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
59	35-44	Male	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa	Altruistic
60	25-34	Male	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Central Africa x2	Altruistic
61	35-44	Female	No	Yes	No	No	N/A	E	Central Africa	Altruistic
62	45-54	Female	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	E	Eastern Africa x2	Financial
63	25-34	Female	No	N/A	No	No	N/A	E	Central Africa	Financial

**TABLE 3**  
**Overview of Interview Data**

#	Length	Recorded	Occupation	Year
1	110 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
2	55 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
3	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
4	80 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2018
5	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
6	120 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
7	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
8	55 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
9	70 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
10	80 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2018
11	45 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
12	65 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
13	65 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
14	70 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
15	85 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
16	80 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
17	120 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2020
18	110 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
19	45 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
20	105 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
21	55 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
22	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
23	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
24	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
25	100 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
26	55min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
27	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
28	85 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
29	85 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
30	95 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
31	40 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
32	65 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
33	110 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
34	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
35	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2020
36	55 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2020
37	40 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
38	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
39	110 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
40	70 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
41	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
42	80 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
43	120 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
44	80 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
45	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
46	95 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
47	105 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
48	90 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
49	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
50	40 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
51	105 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019

52	55 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
53	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
54	75 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
55	85 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
56	75 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
57	70 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
58	120 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
59	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
60	60 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
61	45 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
62	120 min	Yes	Peacekeeper	2019
63	80 min	Yes	UN coordinator	2019
64	90 min	Yes	Diplomat in a mission to the UN, NYC	2019
65	100 min	Yes	Staff member UN human rights unit	2020
66	106 min	No	Office of Military Affairs office, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations	2018
67	55 min	Yes	Human rights and rule-of-law expert, UN Higher Commission	2021
68	85 min	Yes	Peacekeeper in South Sudan	2021
69	80 min	Yes	Senior UN staff member, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations	2020

Note: 89.75 hours of interviews (78 minutes per interview, on average)

**TABLE 4**  
**Overview of Non-Participant Observations**

#	Type	Date	Location	Description	Hours
1-2	Mission-related preparation I	Winter 2018	N/A	Trainings	9 h
3	Physical check for UNMISS	Winter 2018	Geneva	Physical/medical test	4 h
4-5	Mission-related preparation II	Winter 2018	Online	Trainings	8 h
6	Informal gathering	Winter 2019	Geneva	Dinner and drinks	2.5 h
7-9	Mission-related preparation III	Spring 2019	Geneva area	Trainings	7 h
10-13	Mission-related preparation IV	Spring 2019	Online	Meetings	10 h
14-16	Mission-related preparation V	Spring 2019	Geneva	Meetings and trainings	8 h
17-21	Mission-related briefings I	Spring 2019	Geneva	Meetings; briefings	8 h
22-24	Mission-related briefings II	Spring 2019	Geneva	Meetings; briefings	8 h
25	Informal gathering	Spring 2019	Geneva	Dinner and drinks	5.5 h
26-29	Mission-related briefings III	Spring 2019	Geneva	Meetings; briefings	9 h
30	Informal gathering	Spring 2019	Geneva	Drinks	3 h
31-32	Travel to location	2019	To South Sudan	Travel	17 h
33-39	In-country Day 1	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h* <sup>5</sup>
40-44	In-country Day 2	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
45-51	In-country Day 3	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
52-56	In-country Day 4	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
57-61	In-country Day 5	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14h*
62-67	In-country Day 6	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
68-72	In-country Day 7	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
73-77	In-country Day 8	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
78-83	In-country Day 9	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
84-89	In-country Day 10	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
90-96	In-country Day 11	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
97-102	In-country Day 12	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
103-109	In-country Day 13	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
110-116	In-country Day 14	2019	South Sudan	Daily activities	14 h*
117-119	Travel back from mission	2019	From South Sudan	Travel	19 h
120-123	Debriefings I	2019	Geneva	Meeting	9 h
124	Informal gatherings after mission	2019	Geneva	Dinner and drinks	4 h
125-129	Debriefings II	2019	Geneva	Meeting	8 h
130	Informal gatherings after mission	2019	Geneva	Drinks	6 h
131	Informal gathering	Summer 2019	London	Drinks	4 h
132	Informal gathering	Summer 2019	San Francisco	Dinner and drinks	6 h
133-135	Meetings at UN HQ	Fall 2019	Geneva	Planning future mission	3 h
136-140	Meetings at UN HQ	Fall 2019	Geneva	Planning future mission	3 h
141	Informal gathering	Fall 2019	Geneva	BBQ	4 h
142-145	Meetings at UN HQ	Fall 2019	New York City	Meetings	7 h
146-149	Meetings at UN HQ	Fall 2019	New York City	Meetings	5 h
150	Informal gathering	Fall 2019	New York City	Coffee	1.5 h
151-154	Meetings at UN HQ	Spring 2019	Geneva	General discussion	6 h
155	Informal gathering	Spring 2019	Geneva	Dinner and drinks	2.5 h
156-159	Meetings at UN HQ	Summer 2019	Geneva	Meeting for UNMISS	5 h
160-166	Meetings at UN HQ	Spring 2022	New York City	Meetings and discussion of preliminary findings	5 h
167	Informal gathering	Spring 2022	New York City	Dinner and drinks	5 h

\* Conservative calculation of 14 hours of observation per day, as the author was with the group 24/7 and often only got 4–6 hours of sleep.

**TABLE 5**  
**Overview of Documents**

#	Type of document	Description	Author(s)	Year(s) of publication	Target audience
1–82	Internal documents	Documents distributed to newly hired personnel, e.g., guidelines on how to behave in crises or conflict situations	UN Peacekeeping HR department	2012–2018	Internal use; newly hired personnel
83–564	Internal documents	Mission briefings on currently active UN peacekeeping missions (e.g., UNFIL; MUNISCO; UNMISS; MINUSCA; MINUSMA; UNFICYP)	UN Peacekeeping	2016–2019	Internal use
565–680	Internal documents	Reports on incidents (with a focus on UNMISS; UNFIL)	UN Peacekeeping	2018–2020	Internal use
681–790	Internal documents	Summaries and interim reports	UN Peacekeeping	2018–2020	Internal use
791–828	PowerPoint presentations to various constituents	Presentation to other governmental and non-governmental organizations and groups	UN Peacekeeping	2016–2020	External use
829–1200	External documents	Briefings on country situation including motivation, history, problems	UN Peacekeeping	2015–2020	External use; the public
1201–1718	Official documents	Peace treaties and its various iterations for e.g., UNFIL; MUNISCO; UNMISS; MINUSCA; MINUSMA; UNFICYP	UN Peacekeeping	1995–2022	External use; the public
1719–1820	Pictures	Pictures taken during field missions (e.g., UNMISS, MINUSMA, UNFICYP, UNFIL)	UN peacekeepers (diarists and non-diarists)	2019–2022	Internal/personal use
1821–1896	Pictures	Pictures taken during trainings, briefings and seminar in Switzerland, NYC and undisclosed locations	UN peacekeepers (diarists and non-diarists)	2019–2022	Internal/personal use

**TABLE 6**  
**Supporting Evidence**

Concept	Boredom-induced adjustments	Boredom-induced adherence
Idealized future	<p>Once I was approached to be considered to join UNMISS, I was excited by the get go. I'm a father of two and I know being away from my babies would be difficult, but I signed up to bring peace to vulnerable people in need for stability. I know how it's to be brought up with very little in a shitty place with subpar prospects. ... Peace is the only lively form of life for society. (I23)</p> <p>The Cold War was not that kind of active war people have in mind when they think of peace and war in association with UN peacekeeping. However, war does not always mean the barbaric, I crush your skull type of war. Often, it is this type of war, and this is why we are in many African countries. But peace, our ultimate goal, is so much more. It is not the absence of guns ,but starting with a functioning state, protecting their civilians, providing education for children, a functioning healthcare system, no child soldiers, no child slaves. ... This is the fight we are having for peace. This is the peace we want to accomplish. (I55)</p>	<p>We are here to bring change and peace. Stability and prosperity to the region. ... But I mostly stand around. This can't be right. (D10, Phase II)</p> <p>We are here to bring change and be the change that this country desperately needs. (D09; Phase II)</p> <p>I dream for peace for everyone. This dream brought me to this work. (I13)</p> <p>Peace is like the air to breath. Without it, we cannot survive for long. (I10)</p>
Misalignment between work's mundane reality and the idealized future	<p>I thought we are here to change the world. To establish peace to follow our mandate. I knew the mandate is difficult. Every mandate is difficult. ... I'm busy writing reports on breaking of ceasefire arrangements, peace agreements broken once again. ... Very difficult to live up to our promises. (D41, Phase II)</p> <p>Nothing fits here. We come to change what the heck is going wrong here, but—well, what we are actually doing is completely something different that doesn't fit at all. (I49)</p>	<p>To bring peace and make peace a reality, we all have to work on this. It's so much more difficult if the local population, be it politicians, rebels or whoever are working against us. (D6, Phase II)</p> <p>Gap between where we are and where we want to be. (D4; Phase II)</p>
Experiencing (existential) boredom	<p>Only one thing here that is stable and that is my constant state of boredom. (D19, Phase III)</p> <p>We work 8 am–4 pm. We drop our stuff at 4 pm sharp like there aren't shit going on after 4 pm. Until 4 pm we just stand and stand and stand. Shouldn't I have better things to do? (I31)</p> <p>The definition of being a peacekeeper is to bring peace. This is my job. This is the very definition of this profession. ... but then most of my day, I walk around, stay around, and don't do anything. This really goes against my definition of being a change maker. (D21, Phase III)</p>	<p>Being bored at work is frustrating when you want to change the world. (D11, Phase II)</p> <p>We walk through the village. Day after day. I'm tired of doing the same after another. We walk through this mud. We have our little blue flag on the bag pack like we are the scouts. How the heck are we building here anything by just walking around? ... No change here. We continue to walk every day. It's 4 months after we arrived in [location] and besides of my boredom nothing is happening. This can't be</p>

		all what peacekeeping is. ... I'm not helping anybody by just patrolling. No peace will come this way. (D20, Phase II)
Lack of meaning and questioning of purpose	<p><i>Questioning morals and ideals</i></p> <p>If we want to accomplish peace, can we be sticklers to ideals? (D41; Phase III)</p> <p>Keep on wondering if our [moral] codebook is practical enough for our assignment? (D33, Phase III)</p> <p>I came with great sounding ideals like the ones you get taught and politicians like to tell you. However, with some time in the mission you ask yourself if that is really realistic? (I50)</p>	<p><i>Questioning work practices</i></p> <p>Like wtf [swear word] is this all what we have in store to bring peace to this place? (D3; Phase III)</p> <p>I had to ask myself if this is everything that we can do as peacekeepers? (I7)</p>
Morals	<p><i>Situational adjustment of moral values</i></p> <p>If they are playing based on those set of rules, well we can adjust our rules as well. (D41, Phase III)</p> <p>We don't need to have the moral high ground here. There is no point in having the moral high ground here. It's absurd and pointless. ... We must adjust to whatever the fuck is going on here! (D35, Phase IV)</p> <p>Such a fucking asshole. This idiotic bureaucratic know-nothing [official who came for a short two-day delegation presented UN Charta stressing moral superiority] doesn't get shit. We are hindered by mobility constraints, delays, denials, security risks, damaged roads, bad communication and what not. We don't need a lecture on what he thinks are our moral superiority. Come down from your high horse and spend some more time here, idiot! (D31, Phase IV)</p>	<p><i>Clinging to morals</i></p> <p>If we accept being bored to be ok, we give up on our desire to push and make progress. We fail people, communities, entire countries. They had to adjust twice our mandate because nothing is improving. ... We watch daily how they destroy themselves even further. ... Is this morally and ethically ok? (I13)</p> <p>I came with my morals in tact and I won't fucking change them just because nothing is working here. (D1; Phase IV)</p> <p>One moral code book. No different and no discussion needed on the content of what we stand for and what are guidebook is. (D10; Phase IV)</p>
Meaning of the idealized future	<p><i>Redefining meaning</i></p> <p>[Once] you have seen what is going on in [location], you are ok with a little less peace. (D30, Phase IV)</p> <p>Peace means something so different here than what it means back at home. (D38, Phase IV)</p> <p>Change is needed to make peace work in places of the world that have never seen peace since they have born. (I41)</p> <p>Peace is whatever fits to the circumstance. There is no definition of peace. (D41; Phase IV)</p> <p>Peace and war is not black and white. Peace has many shades of grey. Peace is not an absolute thing. At best is a dream we live by. It motivates us but that is it at the end of the day. (D51, Phase III)</p>	<p><i>Maintaining meaning</i></p> <p>I cannot accept that we are ok with children soldiers and I just watch them and shall smile and just observe? I mean what the fuck is seriously wrong with this place and us? How can we accept this under any circumstance? (D11, Phase IV)</p> <p>My work has to matter. Otherwise, I am at the wrong place. This is not worthy to be called United fucking Nations. (I10)</p> <p>Peace doesn't just happen out of a miracle. We promise that peacekeepers protect civilians in places like South Sudan, Congo and whatever other dozen hostile places where we are currently active. We say publicly we protect civilians. This statement means we cannot back down from this word.</p>

People, and here I mean civilians count on us [peacekeepers] live up to our promise. (IC30)

Temporal orientation  
of idealized future

*Anchoring temporal orientation in the present reality*

We need to think of peace as .. here as ... NOW. (D41; Phase III; emphasis in original)

We need to think of peace in the present situation. Not in the glass bowl situation, on paper. We need to be here in the today. What can we do today to make today a better day? How can we achieve now today, Dec 11 2018 the best version of day for them? (D38; Phase IV)

Here and now, and not maybe later and never that will never happen. We need to move away from the if, when, 2030, in three years, let's wait until the next election, after the rain season all will be better. Peace is now and needs to be now. (D35; Phase IV)

*Anchoring temporal orientation in idealized idealized*

Peace is a long way from here (D13, Phase IV)

We need to come to sad realization that peace here will take another decade or 2 or 3, if even that is realistic. (D02; Phase III)

Peace is in 2099 or maybe 2131. Who knows? (D04; Phase III)

We discover the galaxies before we have peace on earth. I think peace has never been further away than now. (I11)

Organizational  
implications

*Pragmatic idealized future*

While often neglected in the immediate peacebuilding given its male dominated space in fighting, negotiations and the public discourse, many significant problems associated to gender inequality and gender-based violence exist. (ID431)

It takes one month that they [females] know my face. Another month, they start smiling at me, another month we can engage in deeper conversations. Females are the lowest in the packing order. It's males, cattle and then females. Females are the most difficult to reach because they have the most to lose. I need to show up in their neighborhood every day. They need to feel us [presence]. They need to see us. ... Many problems exist in their four walls. ... A slow day at work is a good day. A day walking around is a good day. (D32, Phase III)

We go out there and find concrete measures, even if little things, to contribute to a change. (I51)

Best sign for peace is monotony in our work. (D60, Phase X)

I learned to love being bored at work. (I57)

Being bored is great. I love boredom now. Boredom means progress. (I41)

*Absolute idealized future*

It's ridiculous that we need to write down every fucking day how many miles we patrolled. It's worse than my cardiologist checking my step count very so often. (IC59)

There is just one set of morals. We are not in the business of selling our value to the highest bidder. (D11, Phase III)

In no universe can I ... [develop an] understanding of what we are achieving here. I know some people are super flexible doing so but I'm simply not. I cannot throw out my convictions. Some just walk around and are content doing some very trivial work and tell themselves, we are winning hearts and minds by looking after cattle or handing out pamphlets but let's be real. The idea we have for Africa to have a lasting peace across the continent won't be achieved by this. We need to stick to our version of peace to have lasting peace in the world. (I10)

**FIGURE 1**

**How Boredom Shapes the Enactment of Idealized Futures in Extreme Contexts**

