

Everyday peacebuilding and practices in Kenya, South Sudan, Somaliland and Ghana: introduction

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Abstract: Through an ‘everyday’ lens, the articles presented in this supplementary issue draw together diverse discourses, experiences, theorisations and interpretations of everyday peacebuilding. This introduction seeks to locate peacebuilding as a policy agenda and centres the idea of the everyday lens that is useful in countering the dominant focus of liberal peacebuilding that privileges external actors. The authors do not engage in the philosophical debates of everyday but rather uses it as placeholder for ‘the local’; more as a referent to a scale of analysis than a substantive characteristic of distinct phenomena in its own right. This, as presented here, is taken to mean quite distinct things to different scholars, as is illustrated in the collection of articles by the various authors in this supplementary issue.

Keywords: Everyday peace, peacebuilding, Kenya, South Sudan, Somaliland, Ghana, narratives, gender.

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Peacebuilding was popularised by the then UN Secretary General Boutros [Boutros-Ghali's](#) (1992) seminal work *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace-making and Peacekeeping*. This work redefined peacebuilding by proposing a strategy for resolving conflicts and involved four components: preventive diplomacy—actions to prevent disputes from arising or escalating into conflicts; peacemaking—actions aimed at bringing hostile parties to agreement through peaceful means—usually invoking Chapter VI of the UN charter; peacekeeping—the deployment of a UN presence, and post-conflict peacebuilding—actions that identify and support structures that tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. However, the peacebuilding record since the *Agenda for Peace* has been mixed: there was recognition that the international response introduced then did not necessarily follow a neat, linear, chronological progression, and that in practice the various elements overlapped and interlinked, with some mutually supporting others and some even taking place simultaneously ([De Coning 2012](#)).

Similarly, such labels only related to programming, and thus did not have any relevance to the situation on the ground; they were an expression mainly of the need of donor administrations to give meaning to their programming efforts and to be able to activate different funding modalities. People within the society concerned obviously do not perceive the reality they experience in those terms. Even though this has been acknowledged, and it is commonly understood that such labels were only a guide to the administration of donor activities, they continue to impact on the actions and reality on the ground.

The concept of peacebuilding and its resultant set of practices collectively founded the academic literature commonly known as the 'liberal peace interventions' or the liberal 'peacebuilding consensus' ([Crocker et al. 2001](#); [Miall et al. 1999](#)). [Donais \(2012\)](#) argues that liberal peacebuilding was one of two approaches to peacebuilding, the other being communitarian, which focuses on the importance of local traditions and culture. Liberal peace has dominated peacebuilding practice. The practices associated with it include the conviction that conflict management can be achieved through peacebuilding: the reform of institutions and governance; specifically identifying sovereignty as responsibility; highlighting of the interconnections between security and development; and addressing issues of reconciliation to address societal divisions. They are closely linked to the agenda of liberal internationalism which, when viewed in conjunction with liberal parliamentary democracy and liberal market capitalism, equates to the ideals of the 'liberal peacebuilding model'—a model that has become a description of what was intended as the outcome of applying the standard operating procedures ([Hirst 2011](#)). This set of practices includes both short- and long-term interventions organised by both local and external actors. It was also fronted by western nations, who were criticised as promoting liberal peace ([Heathershaw 2008](#)). Thus, other than implicitly claiming a formulaic universal template, the peace that the

Agenda for Peace had proposed was state-centric at heart and considered sovereign states to be the main actors (Richmond 2010). Thus, more frequently, peacebuilding and analysis of conflict were characterised by a state-bias, and therefore peacebuilding is associated with state-building (Körppen 2011).

Similarly, mainstream academic discourses on practices of conflict management overtly moved away from peace and reconciliation towards governance and state-building. The focus on ‘failed states’ or ‘states in situations of fragility’ was brought to the fore, thus creating a strong interest in the debates on ‘state building’, which had become an over-arching concept. The analysis also associated peacebuilding with state building and conflated the two (Newman *et al.* 2009). This assumption was mainly propagated by the view that those states that are defined as ‘failed’ had become a source of international insecurity by becoming a haven for terrorism, drugs, arms, human trafficking and so on.

The core ideas underlying the liberal peace approach adopted by western governments, according to Richmond (2006), remained democratisation, economic liberalisation, neoliberal development, human rights and the rule of law. Thus, following on from the *Agenda for Peace*, and the moral imperative to intervene in places like Somalia, Afghanistan and so on, ‘liberal peace’ became the dominant form of peace-making and peacebuilding favoured by leading states, international organisations and international financial institutions (Mac Ginty 2010). This liberal peace approach is based on the assumption that a liberally constructed state will be more peaceful and developed and will have the capacity to reduce violence and prevent any relapse into chaos. As the number of interventions undertaken increased, in some instances they seemed to have been counterproductive, and by the end of the decade the ‘liberal peace’ model was increasingly called into question by critics who challenged its focus and ability to achieve the goal of promoting peace. Peacebuilders are accused of embracing the hoary ‘liberal peace approach’ uncritically, and consequently they have often designed peacebuilding strategies that actually destabilised fragile transitional polities. Sending (2011) acknowledges that these critical debates have brought to the fore the importance of issues on context sensitivity, local ownership, bottom-up and hybrid forms of peacebuilding; however, there are limitations to these critiques, for example critics engage in alternative conceptions of legitimacy that stress the need for political development to be grounded on the ‘local’—though they do not engage in how the ‘local’ conceptualises their idea of peacebuilding and often assume that ‘local’ is not liberal. Even these critiques are not always contextually specific, as will be illustrated throughout this supplementary issue.

Thus, an ‘everyday’ lens as described by Millar (2020: 312) offers ‘a space of local pro-peace activity distinct from elite-driven top-down politics which, for good or ill, is often considered disinterested in local processes (at best)’. As a lens, therefore, the notion of everyday peace is provided as one that facilitates the move beyond the state

and the formal institution (Richmond 2008) and calls for a re-examination of ‘the taken-for-granted levels of analysis and to expand relevant issues beyond international relations staples’ (Mac Ginty 2014 citing Lister & Jarvis 2013). The everyday peace literature has grown from a critique of liberal approaches to peacebuilding, which has been criticised for limiting attention to institutions, and the location of these activities are confined within an analytical framework that confines peacebuilding to post-conflict environments; and where within this, peacebuilding is presented as a state-building project. Thus, scholarship that has emerged from this is top-down institution-centric (Mac Ginty 2014), with scholars being resistant to perspectives that attempt to look beyond the state. Njeri (2019) argues that both the scholars and the emerging critiques are state-centric in approach. Such approaches have been labelled as sacrifice concern for community, local needs and everyday experiences by Berents (2015). The everyday in the liberal peace debates has been a methodological pathway to theorise peacebuilding’s content and format. It has also served to contextualise the research, taking into account the more complex texture and depth of the processes societies go through.

The contributions in this supplementary issue focus on the concept of ‘everyday’ as gleaned through the empirical research undertaken by early career African scholars. Through their research these scholars aim to contribute to and widen the debate on the extent to which the ‘everyday’ lens allows for an analytical examination and interrogation of daily routines and common practices of communities. An everyday lens allows for engagement around how life-worlds and ecologies are constructed, reconstructed, and shape one another. The work presented here draws attention to diverse contexts (Somaliland, South Sudan, Kenya and Ghana); it includes diverse discourses (mine action; media practice during elections; religious practices, ceremonies and rituals; and gender) and it specifically examines people’s lived experiences within these contexts and practices.

Thus, in this issue, the authors frame the everyday within the liberal peacebuilding debates and critiques which, as others have argued, provides a methodological pathway to theorise peacebuilding’s content and format by contextualising the research and focusing on the complexity that is embedded within societies (De Heredia, 2017; Mac Ginty 2014). While the focus for everyday peace has emerged from the critical liberal peace, the sites of focus for this still remain ‘deeply divided societies; while not the often pathologised liberal peacebuilding sites, the locations have remained predominantly post-conflict or conflictual societies that are mainly in the global south. Thus, as scholars who come from the African continent where a particular narrative

¹ Somaliland has been a peaceful, stable and democratic *de facto* state which broke away and declared independence from Somalia in 1991. While the initial post-breakaway period was characterised by conflict, Somaliland has been since been self-governing with an independent government, democratic elections and a distinct history, although no foreign power recognises Somaliland’s sovereignty.

has dominated the contexts which we inhabit, and as critical scholars, we deliberately include contexts that are largely considered post-conflict (Kenya to a large extent), Ghana and, I would argue, Somaliland.¹ In doing this, we embrace an inclusive conceptualisation of contexts in which peacebuilding occurs and desist from pathologising some locations as the only sites where peacebuilding can take place. Peacebuilding is not only limited to post-conflict contexts, and that it should be a facet of interrogation in any setting where there is potential for community discord. As recent events in the ‘global north’, for example the US (post-election violence) have demonstrated, peacebuilding is an endeavour that can be and should be pursued in contexts that deviate from the pathologised global south. As [Dery et al. \(2022\)](#) demonstrate and rightly argue in this issue, as researchers, we also need to pay attention to contexts where peace prevails. We therefore use the term ‘everyday’ as [Millar \(2020\)](#) describes it, as placeholder for ‘the local’; more as a referent to a scale of analysis than a substantive characteristic of distinct phenomena in its own right.

Using everyday peace as an organising concept has provided for the incorporation of methodologies that highlight bottom-up indicators of everyday peace and security, an idea that [Rayale \(2022\)](#) engages with. Her article is an example that highlights the power of narrative as a methodology, thereby demonstrating how using the concept of everyday allows for different methodologies other than those that are traditionally utilised in International Relations. She uses this and shows how the lived conflict experiences of Somaliland’s women as sites of contestation, and understanding of participation in issues of peace and security in the Somali territories, has meant taking women’s lived experiences of conflict more seriously. The ‘everyday’ that Rayale’s article focuses on reflects how cultural practices are enlisted by women to reappropriate their agency. Previously [Bedigen \(2017\)](#) has called for the conceptualising indigenous peacebuilding and the culturally constitutive nature of the Honyomiji institution; this article views indigenous women’s ‘visible and invisible’ roles and practices as key in peacebuilding, even at conflict intensities. Rather than viewing the everyday acts as hidden or as evidence of resistance to the dominant peacebuilding approaches, this issue suggests the need for attention to the ways that these everyday practices, narratives and cultural forms of expression are made visible and provide meaning to the ordinary citizens of these societies.

While the dominant peacebuilding debates consider peacebuilding as a discourse of a singular liberal peace, disregarding the fact that peacebuilding is not a homogeneous entity, for one to understand, one must explore the multiple discourses by shifting the analytical focus to multiple peacebuildings (see [Heathershaw 2008](#)). Thus in this issue we seek to demonstrate this idea of multiple peacebuildings—in a sense we explore ideas that do not fit within the orthodoxy that exists in most academic and practitioner literature, which usually refers to pro-peace actions in conflict-affected contexts. Thus a study such as [Chiliswa’s \(2022\)](#), which brings to attention to the role

that everyday citizen-initiated media practices play in influencing various social/political causes finds as much a place as the study by [Dery et al. \(2022\)](#), which calls for the attention to and the need to engage with how ‘everyday struggles and subjectivities of masculinity may shape peacebuilding and nonviolent practices at the local level’, in peaceful contexts. Dery calls on emerging scholars (such as those contributing to this special issue—to be prepared to challenge the status quo, ‘we should not only focus on the excesses, damages, and dangers of patriarchal masculinities to peacebuilding’, rather, a critically sympathetic and culturally driven analysis of men in their multiple locatedness should sharpen our analysis of the everydayness of peace or peace in the mundane, especially at interpersonal levels.

[Bedigen \(2022\)](#) highlights how the political and economic initiatives that are fronted by external organisations are prioritised and presented as crucial in the planning, implementation and achievement of national peacebuilding strategies, yet, while scholarship exists that demonstrates that in South Sudan and or indeed in sub-Saharan Africa, religion (i.e., Christianity and Islam) is significant in conflict, the same is excluded in peacebuilding efforts ([Ouellet 2013](#); [Schirch 2015](#)). Where these have been included, for example the NSCC’s national peacebuilding processes,² the inclusion of Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions have remained at the peripheries, and within that, indigenous religious practices and ceremonies or rituals are largely excluded ([Bedigen 2017](#); [2020](#); [Hancock 2017](#)). Such deliberate exclusion denies agency from communities that engage in such practices, and it privileges externally driven processes. Thus, as is indicative of the mainstream practice of peacebuilding and the discourse therein, the recipients of the practice of peacebuilding remain passive and voiceless, perhaps explaining why according to the critiques, peacebuilding is seen to have failed. As argued elsewhere, that this is partly because the actors and recipients may have contrasting views of what the end result is; and their conceptualisation is not taken into consideration ([Njeri 2019](#)). There is also a generalisation, and an underlying assumption, that because the peacebuilding arena is normally a post-conflict environment, then ‘local’ leaders and or indigenous everyday rituals and ceremonies have no place of local legitimacy, as argued by Bedigen who notes that the majority of these scholarship ignores the dominance of indigenous religions and their linkages to community every day ceremonies and rituals that contributes to peacebuilding, yet, political and economic initiatives by external NGOs are seen as crucial in the planning, implementation and achievement of national peacebuilding strategies.

This is further exemplified in the article focusing on Somaliland by [Njeri \(2022\)](#). The study demonstrates how clan elders commanded high levels of legitimacy as agents of

² New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) is an organisation formed in 1989/1999 and comprises six churches located in Southern Sudan: Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Presbyterian Church of Sudan, African Inland Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church, and Sudan Interior Church.

peacebuilding, both within the locally led peace process and in providing direction and leadership in the establishment of a local responses to the clearance of landmines and unexploded ordnance that were scattered in the country after the war. As established in this study, the elders are continually seen by the Somaliland people as the custodians and the legitimate authority to engage in nurturing their version of peace. The central role played by local elders dominated the local conceptualisations of peace that this manifested. The study demonstrates that after international (liberal peace) actors took control of mine action, very different ideas and everyday practices associated with them diminished the intrinsic value of an activity that had been core to the peace process.

In conclusion, therefore, the articles presented in this supplementary issue collectively draw together diverse discourses, experiences, theorisations and interpretations of everyday peacebuilding. As a lens, the idea of the everyday offers scholars seeking to critique the liberal peace an opportunity, which is viewed as an unsympathetic and often ineffectual top-down bureaucracy. The articles serve to demonstrate that the everyday in this context is not necessarily linked with international peacebuilding efforts, which are usually externally led and limited in terms of duration, scope and geographical reach; and while the dominant argument is that conflict is rarely total, an everyday lens then becomes useful in contexts where peace is also not always total; an everyday lens allows us to question the fixity and homogeneity of categories and approaches.

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To cite the article: [Njeri, S. \(2022\)](#), ‘Everyday peacebuilding and practices in Kenya, South Sudan, Somaliland and Ghana: introduction’, *Journal of the British Academy*, 10(s1): 1–9.

<https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s1.001>

Journal of the British Academy (ISSN 2052–7217) is published by
The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk