The British Academy

Journal of the British Academy, **10(s1)**, 109–133
https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s1.109
Posted 15 March 2022

Examining mine action's 'peaceability' potential through everyday narratives and practices in Somaliland

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Abstract: The way in which societies conceptualise peace, and therefore peacebuilding, is dependent on various factors, including the society itself, its history, cultural and social foundations, the legacies of violence and peacebuilding initiatives. Drawing on interviews with various constituents in Somaliland, this article will demonstrate how bottom-up narratives and understandings of peace and peacebuilding have been shaped by the legacy of war and shared history of the reconciliation process, which was led by the elders. Similarly, this conceptualisation of peace defines what activities are considered as peacebuilding. However, the extent of this conceptualisation does not extend to mine action; an activity that was initiated by the elders during the post-war reconciliation process, and whose outcomes, such as facilitating mobility, safety and security, were outlined as peace indicators by those interviewed. Thus, while mine action has intrinsic peacebuilding potential, it is not conceptualised as peacebuilding by either international or local peacebuilders. This paper therefore seeks to critically examine this limitation. It employs Goodhand & Hulme's (2000) concept of a peace audit, an approach to critically look at the way in which an intervention is undertaken to assess how this has raised or lowered the probability of peace. Beyond the history, using the peaceability approach, the article analyses the extent to which there are endowments of 'peace capital' accrued or undermined by the sector's everyday activities. It concludes that the 'everyday' actions of the mine action actors contribute to the way in which local communities comprehended mine action interventions through the daily activities of the actors on the ground, their contrasting lifestyles, values and behaviour.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Somaliland, mine action, everyday peace, peaceability.

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Introduction

Somaliland's post-conflict peacebuilding process centred around bottom-up, localised, and particularistic conflict-calming measures and people-to-people activities that moved the society towards conflict transformation. This corresponds to the liberal peace literature which agitates for 'bottom-up' and 'hybrid' forms of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2009). Somaliland provides evidence of this kind of bottom-up and hybrid forms of peacebuilding. Analysis on the same has been limited to the state building process and has disregarded other activities such as mine action, upon which initiation took the same approach. This is because of a state-centric approach, which limits their critiques to statebuilding (see Njeri 2019). These critiques challenge the standardised 'one size fits all approach' employed by interveners, yet they take the same approach, and in so doing apply a broad-brush across a diverse range of programmes, actors, issues and activities that are indeed peacebuilding contexts or activities. These critiques also neglect the multiple voices that may sometimes exist within these groups, be they local actors or international actors. Yet, these critics call for context specificity from peacebuilding interveners (Sending 2009a).

As a specialised activity and distinct sector within the broader humanitarian sector, mine action[1] is always listed as one of the peacebuilding activities—however, scrutiny of the academic literature re-affirmed that as an activity it was broadly conceptualised as peacebuilding by international actors and scholars (Harpviken & Isaksen 2004; Kjellman *et al.* 2003). As outlined later in this paper, several factors contributed to mine action being conceptualised as peacebuilding. However, within both the academic literature and in practice, it is only marginally acknowledged as part of peacebuilding because those directly involved within the sector, including donors, tend to limit mine action's potential narrowly within security domain rather than as an activity that supports a broader range of activities within the peacebuilding spectrum. Within academia and amongst critical scholars, mine action has escaped scrutiny all together.

For context, the underpinning research within which this paper is anchored sought to understand the extent to which the dominant critiques of the liberal peace agenda were relevant to Somaliland. To explore this, it examined the implementation of

[1] Mine Action is a collective term for 'activities which aim to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of landmines and ERW [explosive remnants of war], including cluster munitions' (United Nations Mine Action Service definition). These activities include advocacy, mine risk education, humanitarian demining or clearance, victim assistance, and the destruction of stockpiles. 'Mine action sector' refers collectively to the various organisations that engage in integrated approaches seeking to reduce the disastrous impact of mines and other explosive remnants of war on affected communities. The sector is not a homogenous entity; rather, each organisation maintains and performs their specialties or preferences.

landmine clearance programmes—(collectively referred to as mine action) (Njeri 2015; 2019; 2020). Some of the findings suggest that, while peacebuilding practices and narratives may place mine action as peacebuilding, research participants in Somaliland did not explicitly see this link. Yet, in response to the question on peace and peace indicators, the responses highlighted key indicators that are addressed by mine action such as mobility, security, stability, safety, freedom and lack of fear. Peacebuilding activities were articulated as the reconciliation process and the bottom-up community-led peace process. While mine action had also been initiated as part of this community-led process, respondents did not deem it as an activity linked to peacebuilding beyond the provision of employment and, even then, not necessarily because it addressed the demobilisation and employment to ex-combatants as outlined in peacebuilding doctrines. Therefore, the research questions that guide this enquiry are (i) 'why is mine action narrowly understood or seen as peacebuilding in Somaliland, yet it addresses the key indicators of peace such as mobility, stability, employment, safety and livelihoods? (ii) what limits mine action's intrinsic peacebuilding potential?

For the first question, an everyday lens was employed to make meaning of the peace indicators; in doing so, this research contributes to an empirical anchoring of the 'everyday' through the case study of mine action in Somaliland. It also contributes to the deepening of the analysis in my previous work—which demonstrates that critical scholars limit their critiques to statebuilding and institutions, thus leading to generalised critiques, devoid of context—by demonstrating that everyday bottom-up narratives may differ from those employed by international peace-support actors, and that bottom-up and top-down views of peace, and in this case peacebuilding, often rely on different sources of information.

For the second question, I acknowledge that beyond the intrinsic values of mine action's enabling potential for peacebuilding, it is not the quality of a single factor which reinforces a conflict or helps achieve sustainable peace; what counts is the way the different factors interact and the kind of context that they occur in. Therefore, I adopt a 'peaceability'[2] methodology (peace audit), whereby mine action achievements are conceptualised in terms of their role in increasing or decreasing probabilities for peace, rather than as precise cause-and-effect relationships. A peace audit therefore allows for the critical examination of practices of mine action actors, and also examines the way in which mine action is undertaken in Somaliland to understand how this has raised or lowered the probability for peace (Goodhand & Hulme 2000: 3). I posit that local communities show their resistance to this very idea when external actors take over the activity. They do this through meaning making and contributing

[2] This approach didn't seem to gain traction, but I encountered this earlier in my work and found it as a most relevant and useful as an analytical lens. See the *Peace Building and Complex Political Emergencies Working Paper Series* that introduced and used this approach.

to their own framing and understanding of notions of what they consider their everyday peace and/or peacebuilding.

The next section traces mine action within the peacebuilding discourse, highlighting how these intersect with policy and practice. This is followed by a description of Somaliland's post-conflict reconstruction context, focusing on the emergence of the reconciliation process in which mine action was identified as a critical activity. This demonstrates the intrinsic nature of mine action and demonstrates that both the reconciliation process and mine clearance processes were initiated from the bottom-up by clan elders, yet the bifurcation of the activities is demonstrated by the way in which the research respondents articulate and/or conceptualise the two activities. The third and final section examines the limitation of mine action's peaceability potential through the examination of the everyday practices of mine action actors.

Mine action and peacebuilding

Mine action is conceptualised as peace building through various process, including the normative framing through the mine ban movement, the intrinsic values of mine action as an activity and the institutionalisation of mine action within the work of the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross, among others. The UN, through the 'Agenda for Peace', explicitly called for the challenges of the presence of landmines to be addressed within a peacebuilding agenda (Boutros-Ghali 1992 paragraph 58). Thus, landmines were reframed as a humanitarian, rather than a military and security issue, linked to peacebuilding reform. Where contamination was acknowledged and accepted as a humanitarian problem, initiatives to address mine and unexploded ordinance (UXO) contamination formed an integral part of peace agreements and ceasefires.[3] The assumption being that this provided a potentially neutral platform from which parties can agree to meaningful measures. Moser-Puangsuwan (2009)

[3] As was the case for Nicaragua (1990), Cambodia (1991), El Salvador (1991), Mozambique (1992), Angola (1994), Croatia (1994), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995), Kosovo (1999), Democratic Republic of Congo (1999), Burundi (2000), Philippines (2001), Ethiopia/Eritrea (2000), Sudan (2004), Senegal (2004), Nepal (2006). Similarly in Guatemala, one of the agreements signed on 17 June 1994 was an Agreement of Resettlement of the Displaced Population due to the Armed Conflict. However, for the agreement to take effect, there was recognition of the necessity to address the problem of munitions contamination and this was highlighted and included in the agreement. A domestic approach was applied, and the Volunteer Fireman's Corps (CVB) were called to serve as a neutral actor to mine action and also as a liaison between government authorities. This was because the population was reluctant to trust the military and cooperate with it in providing information needed to conduct clearance to meet the needs of its particular post-conflict situation (Fiederlein 2005). More recent cases include Mali, Senegal and Niger where mine action projects have provided opportunities for former opponents from governments and rebel groups to cooperate to determine the extent of landmine contamination and clear the mines.

examined peace agreements and noted that indeed in contexts where the problem of contamination by mines was or is acknowledged by all parties to the conflict, this has served as a fruitful starting point for the development of joint solutions, therefore serving as a foundation for conflict resolution.

Other initiatives, such as the *1999 Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes from a Development-Oriented Point of View* (also known as the Bad Honnef[4] framework) had been developed by the mine action sector and called for the integration of mine action within peacebuilding and development. Harpviken and Skaešra (2003) suggest that this placed the framing of the sector as a component within the larger peacebuilding agenda and framed mine action as a key component within peacebuilding and development and its integration within national and local processes. While the guidelines conceptually framed mine action within peacebuilding, Jennings *et al.* (2008), took the peacebuilding palette as illustrated by the Utstein Study (Smith 2004) as a starting point and expanded it to a Humanitarian Mine Action Peacebuilding Palette as an alternative method of exploring mine action's peacebuilding potential. The 'palette approach' attempted to conceptualise the linkages between mine action, peacebuilding and development, which linked long-term developmental processes beyond outcomes, recovery and humanitarian concerns to mine clearance.

Therefore, in practice, mine action became an integral part of contemporary peacebuilding activities that collectively came to be referred to as liberal peacebuilding, a concept and practice of peacebuilding that is primarily influenced by the theoretical-political framework that is liberal peace theory (Richmond 2011; Chandler 2010; Pugh *et al.* 2008; Paris 2004). Like peacebuilding, mine action has been institutionalised in the work of the UN and international agencies, international financial institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the many actors engaged in conflict environments. It is mainly implemented by external actors based on standardised 'one size fits all templates', which are in complete collision with the contexts in which they operate. See (Njeri 2015 chapter 4) for an extensive debate on this.

The next section outlines the post-conflict reconstruction efforts that Somaliland underwent after its secession from Somalia, including the clan-led reconciliation and state building process and the efforts towards mine clearance, which were deemed critical to this process.

Somaliland's post-conflict reconstruction context

Somaliland is a non-recognised state that portrays typical characteristics of a liberal peacebuilding context, a post-conflict environment. Somaliland is 'very much

[4] Named after the venue of the conference where the guidelines were drafted: Bad Honnef, Germany.

a product of war' (Spears 2003). The immediate past closely intertwines with the history of Somalia and the armed resistance against the regime of Siyad Barre. In 1991, after the fall of Barre's regime, Somaliland made a unilateral declaration of independence and inherited some challenges, which are the legacy of the Cold and civil wars. This was followed by internal problems marked by episodes of large-scale violence. At the end of the civil strife, society became militarised not just in terms of the size of its military and the influx of the weapons into the streets, but also because of the tendency to which intergroup relations and conflict were defined in narrow military terms.

However, with the collapse of the Somalia state and its degeneration into a classic example of a 'failed State', Somaliland went through a process of state rebuilding, which saw the northern clans commence an internally driven process towards reconciliation as a means to community cohesion and state building. The clan elders (Guurti), together with hundreds of delegates and observers from across Somaliland, agreed on a peace charter that outlined the following: a transfer of power from the Somaliland National Movement interim government to a (*'beel'*) community-based system; election of a civilian president (Maxamed Xaaji Ibrahim Cigal) and a vice president (Cabdirahman aw Cali), and adoption of a national charter and a peace charter.[5] The Academy for Peace and Development in Hargeisa, in collaboration with Interpeace, documented the process that brought peace and stability and they cite no less than 38 clan-based peace and reconciliation conferences and meetings between 1990 and 1997 (A.P.D./Interpeace 2008: 13; Ibrahim and Terlinden 2010). This process of reconciliation went hand in hand with the state-building process where grassroots peace negotiations served as the basis of constructing the state. According to Debiel *et al.* (2009: 41) 'under circumstances where the state gained a foothold, it increasingly became a central "arena" of governance with formal rules of the game gaining importance'.

Various factors are attributed to the success of the reconciliation process, not least that it was locally owned and materially supported by the communities and the diaspora Somalilanders; it involved voluntary participation from each clan with a broad-based consultation process; and agreement was consensual, meaning that resolutions were inclusive (Ibrahim and Terlinden 2010). This process did not have to adhere to any deadlines, such as those associated with liberal peacebuilding processes in Somalia (Phillips 2013). This process resulted in a hybrid system of government which incorporates an elected president and lower house of parliament with an upper house that consists of traditional clan elders known as the *guurti* (Walls and Kibble,

[5] These were intended to serve as the basis for efforts towards peacebuilding and state-building during a further transitional period of two years.

2010: 5).[6] The clan elders became the custodians of conflict management, including the application of customary law and negotiating political disputes. This has been widely viewed both within Somaliland and externally as a key ingredient of peace that prevails today (Menkhaus 2006).

At the onset of this locally led process, elders representing their clans acknowledged that mines and other unexploded ordnances and their extant challenges needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The government of Siyad Barre had bombarded the region with artillery and aerial shelling, reducing the region to rubble and leaving thousands of UXO, and dwellings and water points had been extensively mined (ICG 2003; Landmine Monitor 1999). Thus, the clan elders leading the reconciliation process unanimously agreed that mine clearance was a pre-requisite to any peace and reconciliation or rebuilding process (WSP International 2005). They also agreed that this was to be carried out by the ex-combatants from the Somaliland National Movement, who formed an indigenous mine clearance body, civilian clearance outfit called the Humanitarian Mine Clearance Pioneer Corps, commonly referred to as 'Pioneers' (Omaar *et al.* 1993).

This approach had two key advantages: as in other contexts where the problem of landmines is acknowledged by all parties to the conflict, it served as a fruitful starting point for the development of joint solutions between the conflicting clans; this decision by the elders was not conceived or conceptualised as a standardised Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme—which were to dominate the post-conflict peacebuilding interventions[7]—even though it was to be undertaken by ex-combatants. The approach did play a crucial role for the demobilisation of ex-combatants and provided an alternative employment to those who had largely been engaged in the rebellion—mine clearance presenting them with an opportunity of demobilising and reintegrating with their respective communities.

Formally working under the Somaliland Ministry of Defence on a voluntary basis, they operated with basic equipment that had been salvaged from the national

[6] Walls and Kibble describe a *guurti* as any individual or group who assumes a mediatory role. They argue that this term has, more recently, been institutionalised and, many would argue, politicised in the Somaliland context through its application to the upper house of the parliament. The etymology of the term refers to the necessary wisdom of any person or group responsible for mediating disputes and can be applied to individuals or groups at various levels (Walls and Kibble, 2010: 8).

[7] One of the Elders interviewed for this research, a former Pioneer himself and who had been involved in mine action work in parliament, argued that the response at the time was not informed and argues that this work predated the standardised DDR programs which were to later dominate post-conflict peacebuilding interventions, but had at its core the disarmament or arms management program, the facilitation of demobilisation and the reintegration of ex-combatants.

army. The initial team comprised of 60 volunteers[8] who had served as combat engineers (probably laying mines) during the war (Landmine Monitor 1999). While the challenge was daunting, the work of the Pioneers was commended for initiating and drawing attention to the huge challenges that contamination was causing. Their work was inadequate compared to the need, and 40 per cent of the initial group lost their lives or were injured, mainly due to the lack of proper equipment, but also because of the way in which the mines had been laid (Omaar *et al.* 1993: 54).

At the time there were only two[9] humanitarian mine clearance organisations globally and these had only just been constituted. It took the injury of two German nurses working with *Médecins Sans Frontières*, an aid organisation, for the challenges encountered by the Pioneers to come to the attention of the European Economic Commission (EEC) delegation based in the Kenyan capital. Following this incident, the EEC provided funding to a British commercial company called RIMFIRE to survey, support through training and equip the work of the Pioneers. This was a period marred by political upheaval as the Somaliland community was recalibrating after an intense period of armed conflict with Somalia. It was also a time when most of the reconstruction efforts by the international actors were being directed to the crisis in Southern Somalia. This means that there were limited resources available, and therefore communities associated the presence of demining with opportunities for employment and procurement of contracts, which were seen as more important than the removal of landmines. This led to problems with hiring and subcontracting for RIMFIRE. Menkhaus (2006: 6) notes that 'in some instances the lucrative business that demining contracts generated resulted in Somali communities actually planting new landmines in order to create new demining opportunities'. The different clans also viewed mine clearance assets and the cleared mines as their own resources, which could advance their cause, thus looting of vehicles and other assets such as radios, vehicle antennas, ballistic jackets and helmets belonging to RIMFIRE became a common occurrence. The politicisation of mine clearance eventually led to the breakdown of the relationship with the Somaliland government and their acrimonious exit (Njeri forthcoming 2022; Omaar *et al.* 1993).

Before RIMFIRE's exit, the United Nations Operation in Somalia II briefly took over the responsibility of demining in Somalia, including Somaliland and requested RIMFIRE to continue working in Somaliland while they developed their future strategies. This coincided with the UN's embrace of the DDR process as an essential

[8] More were recruited over time.

[9] These were HALO Trust, founded in 1988 in Afghanistan by a retired British military officer, and Mines Advisory Group UK, founded in 1989 in the UK initially undertaking assessment missions in Afghanistan and Cambodia in 1990 and 1991 with the intention that their findings would mobilise governments and international agencies about the impact of landmines on civilians. A report on Somaliland was also a key document that contributed to this discourse.

element of its multidimensional post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction function, with demining being part this (Boutros-Ghali 1992).

With the exit of RIMFIRE, no serious mine action programmes were carried out; this was also a period when there wasn't the expertise for carrying out humanitarian demining in the complex emergency; however, it was reported that almost 78,000 mines were removed and the number of civilians injured by mines dropped considerably (Research Directorate 1995).[10] The role of the Pioneers and their contribution in supporting RIMFIRE was seen as critical in facilitation reconstruction (as highlighted by the quote from a UN senior manager during an interview). To date, reference to the Pioneers elicits reflections of respect and admiration from the community.

> When we went in in the 90s, the whole security, the operational situation was very difficult. Even as late as 1999 it was bad so there is no doubt that the Pioneers worked on an incredibly difficult situation. Security was a lot worse than when we were there. And I think and I believe now, and I've said that I take my hat off to those guys. I think they did a great job. The NGOs subsequently spent a lot of time completing the clearance of several of those big mine fields down near the border that RIMFIRE and the Pioneers were not able to complete because of insecurity problems. And yes, they missed mines undoubtedly and I saw mines that went off, but the thing is they reduced the risk in those areas.[11]

When the security situation improved about mid-1999, various international humanitarian mine action NGOs, through funding from various donors, started mine action programmes in Somaliland. At the peak, Somaliland had at least five international organisations[12] coordinated by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to undertake various mine action related activities. Mine action continues to be undertaken by international actors to date.

In conclusion, both these activities were initiated by community leaders and occurred in tandem; however, reconciliation and state building has become an example that liberal democratic state building is not the only way to generate social order and has become a prime example of a bottom-up hybrid form of peacebuilding (Boege *et al.* 2009); it has been offered as an alternative approach for peacebuilders (Pugh *et al.* 2008; Richmond 2010). However, mine action was part of a bottom-up peacebuilding process, an activity that, while it was initially locally led, was also first to be taken over by external actors. Critical peacebuilding scholars have

[10] Accessed 7 January 2022 at https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3ae6a8060.

[11] Interview in Nairobi, 13 September 2012, with senior mine action manager. The person had worked with various mine action organisations in various positions, including technical advisor, programme manager and regional director. At the time of the interview, he had left the Somaliland and was an independent consultant but still within the sector.

[12] Including Danish Demining Group, HALO Trust, Santa Barbara Foundation, Handicap International, Care International and Mine Tech (a commercial company hired by UNDP).

not engaged in examining mine action vis a vis peacebuilding, illustrating that their critiques are based on systems, structures and organisational values of international peacebuilding based on a single interpretation—liberal peacebuilding, that is, state building. These critics centre external actors as integral to this process and call for them to be more context-sensitive and supportive of local ownership in peacebuilding (Pouligny 2009; Sending 2009b). Doing this they sacrifice concern for community, local needs and everyday experience, thus their critiques are generalised and are a broad-brush over diverse contexts, which limits a nuanced contextual analysis. These critics fall short and skim over how communities in given spaces conceive of conflict and peace because this narrative is usually outside of the ambit of external observers. Therefore, an everyday peace lens is required as this seeks to interrogate this invisible 'hidden transcript' (Mac Ginty 2013: 425). As an approach, the everyday lens takes into account activities that are excluded and gives agency to those who are marginalised, using these experiences as the basis for a more responsive way of understanding peace. Similarly, reconceptualising and complicating a notion of 'everyday peace' as embodied recognises the Somaliland community as knowledgeable commentators and observers of their world, as the following section will illustrate.

Understanding peace and peacebuilding through everyday narratives

Instead of starting with a predefined concept of peace, an 'everyday peace lens' calls for and invokes investigating the notion of peace in a specific context. Of importance, is the awareness that the way in which societies conceptualise peace and therefore peacebuilding is dependent on various factors including the society itself, its history, cultural and social foundations and the legacies of violence it has as experienced. Similarly, Boulding (2000) argued that a basic process of socialisation of social groups is developed over time and is rooted not only in local culture, but also informed by the immediate environment and the historical memory of times of crisis and change. This is evident in Somaliland, where peace conceptualised narrowly of as an antithesis of war. This view dominated the way in which the interviewees responded to this question—'what is peace?' The absence of armed violence was articulated in comparison to the rest of Somalia—as expressed in the following excerpts.

> Peace is the absence of armed violence in everyday life. Hargeisa is not like Mogadishu. (Local NGO actor).

> To the Somaliland people, the indicator that the country is in peace is the absence of war. (Government official)

> As a nation coming from civil war, the usual indication for peace is that we are free from war (Former deminer).
>
> Somaliland people see peace by looking from their own perspective; even though the situation is bad, so long as people are not killing one another, then there is peace; the people do not care about poverty, this has always been there. (Academic, University of Hargeisa)
>
> On a more personal level, peace is being safe and the experience of safety in my country. (Somaliland mine action centre, official)
>
> The first thing would be that there are no raids or attacks. If there is for example a shooting in the village, it will be treated as an isolated incidence. So, people in the village may not say that they are not peaceful. So, I think absence of war may be considered as peace (Programmes officer—international NGO)

Peace was also framed in concepts such of mobility, safety, security, stability, freedom and lack of fear, which are all-encompassing conditions. This is relevant especially in the broader conceptualisation of peace as applied within what can broadly fit within the human security discourse. In this conception, peace is akin to security, which is associated with personal security and not the security of the country—thus, embracing the basic tenets of human security, where to be at peace is a matter first reflected in the lives of the people and not in the larger notion of the state. Peace was linked to personal levels and rarely at state level and this was mainly to the absence of fear and with mobility:

> People living free from fear and able to move freely. Mobility of the people is an important indicator for us a community that we are at peace. (Peacebuilding coordinator, government office)
>
> There is no conflict. When they see people working, business is open, movement of people. No conflicts with rivals, no fear of movement and can carry out all the operations they need to. (Government official)
>
> I wake up in the morning I can come to work safely, I can go to town and buy stuff, I can go with my girlfriend to public places such as restaurants without fear etc. I can also access facilities such as medical, education, mosques, etc; all this are the indicators for peace. (Local NGO interviewee)

According to one interviewee, peace is when there is physical security; and this relates with concepts of basic freedoms such as freedom from needs (such as hunger), and in a more restricted sense, that people should be free from fear (of war, for example). This conceptualisation was expressed within the comforts of the cultural explanations.

> Physical security is one (indicator of peace) and when I add 'milk' it is because of the other security which is the basic needs. Both are very important. The other thing is, because of the clan system social support system is involved and that is important for building peace. So having good relations with other is part of the peace. That is peace at all levels. (Programme manager—Local NGO)

Exploring the missing link between mine action and peacebuilding

The dominant narrative by international actors engaged in addressing landmine contamination tends to focus on demining as a peacebuilding activity because clearance, and to a certain extent mine risk education, contributes to safety and security for communities and facilitates mobility. The official lingua by the mine action sector continually justified mine action as peacebuilding because they argued 'it facilitated the nomadic way of life especially in providing an enabling environment for the free movement of livestock an important economic activity for the communities'. However, despite mine action directly facilitating mobility for communities and/or including livestock movement through improved infrastructure, at the time of this research mine action was not considered a priority by the majority of those interviewed, both international and local actors; and neither did the mine action practitioners themselves consider mine action as peacebuilding.

What the responses below demonstrate is that, as with peace, the immediate history also dictated what activities were considered under the peacebuilding umbrella. Peacebuilding was linked to the reconciliation process that the communities underwent.

> In the Somaliland context, when we talk about peacebuilding, we are talking about reconciliation among clans and political groups. (International actor, mine action organisation)

> Peacebuilding is both the reconciliation and conflict resolution process and also later on building on common interests. (Local NGO)

Beyond community reconciliation, peacebuilding was linked to the reconstitution of security, order and the state and the overwhelming view was that this activity was the reserve of the local communities in the absence of international actors.

> The peacebuilding in Somaliland did not have anything to do with international agencies here and I think that is a good thing. Peacebuilding is still local. (Local academic)

> Peace is what we have built from scratch. It's not peace that is coming from outside. It is not people coming to mediate or the international community coming to this. Peace is at the grass root level, house to house. (Women's rights activist)

As an activity, therefore, peacebuilding was seen as being outside the remit of any external actors and confined to the elders and government officials; this view was articulated by both local and international actors, including those from the mine action sector, as illustrated below.

> As you know, in Somaliland we do have our own perception of peacebuilding and I don't think our partner international organisation does see most of the post conflict reconstruction work as a part of peacebuilding except on issues of governance. The peacebuilding in Somaliland didn't have anything to do with international agencies here and I think that was a good thing. Peacebuilding is still local. (Senior academic & politician)

> We still have problems. The problems we have are the same ones we had before. Clan conflicts, land disputes. However, this is still not for the international community to sort out. It is for us, the elders, the parliamentarians, and Somaliland people. We have parliamentarians and elders from each of the two sides, they talk together and then talk to us. UNDP or other international actors have nothing to do with that. (Somali elder, previously engaged in mine action)

Similarly, while the majority of those interviewed indicated that freedom of movement, mobility of people and physical security were important indicators for peace, one would have expected, then, an activity whose outcome directly facilitated (which mine clearance does) would mean this would be included as such; however, very few interviewees saw this. For those who did, for example the interviewees below, the link was tenuous and linked to livelihoods.

> Well, mine action is peacebuilding because if you define peace as absence of physical harm, then mines cause physical harm. So, it is peacebuilding. It is giving people security, freeing grazing area thus improving the economy. Mine clearance helps people move freely. But the question is who laid the mines in the first place? Is it Somaliland people or is it someone else? People do not see it as peacebuilding and neither do I see it as peacebuilding component. It is just an extra activity. (Local actor—INGO programme manager)

They acknowledged, however, that mine clearance did create a secure environment, though the majority did not see the relationship or linkage of mine action to peace or peacebuilding. This view was expressed by those who worked within the sector either directly or indirectly, and there was no distinction in views between national and international actors.

> There is peace, therefore mine clearance is not part of creating that peace, but is part of reconstruction. (UNHCR head of sub-office)

A senior UN official based in Nairobi who had oversight of the UN-led activities in the region suggested that while peacebuilding was linked to mine action generally, the Somaliland context was different and therefore mine action did not contribute to peacebuilding.

> I suppose it depends—because mine action is such a broad range of activities as well as peacebuilding involves a broad line of activities. An activity might not be related to peace building at all but because of the situation, it does. In Somaliland, removal of explosives in communities increases stability but that doesn't necessarily bring peacebuilding.

Similarly, a programme manager with one of the clearance organisations shared the same views as a senior academic and politician who had previously been engaged in campaigning against the use of landmines. Neither saw the link between mine action and peacebuilding; the mine action programme manager argued that mine clearance and peacebuilding were mutually exclusive.

> I don't necessarily see mine action as peacebuilding because the problem of mines in Somaliland is based on a war that ended in the mid-70s. The clearance of them now is not remotely relevant to peacebuilding in Somaliland. Because they are basically just an historical wreck that causes accidents on occasions or prevent the full use of land. They are not doing anything necessarily to affect peace. You could argue, and it has been argued, that the continued presence of large tank mines or large caliber ammunition provides a supply of explosives which could then be used for terrorism or other purposes. There has been some evidence of this. So, you could argue that the full clearance and destruction of those minefields will remove that threat. But generally, without that dynamic, and that dynamic doesn't exist for instance in Angola, and Angola has peace, and it still has mines. So, I am not entirely sure of the full link of mine clearance and peace. They are mutually exclusive. (International actor—programme manager, mine action organisation)

> I think mine action is done and has nothing to do with peacebuilding. Mine action has to do with reducing the risk of people using mines during conflict, but it is not in itself part of peacebuilding. But it reduces our ability to use mines during conflict. Based on that you need to make people see that using landmines is not the way and also you need to make sure that there are not landmines in the hands of individuals or militias. So that's where it would fit. (Senior academic & local politician)

Thus, as highlighted earlier, while within the academic literature and in practice, mine action is acknowledged to contribute to peacebuilding, it has been within the narrow view of mine action's role in enhancing security, with this being linked closely to the DDR programmes where provision of employment for ex-combatants is critical. The provision of employment was repeatedly highlighted by those who were interviewed. The mine action sector in general was seen as key in this. Unemployment remains a huge problem in Somaliland; therefore, any activity that is seen to employ a huge workforce is deemed as contributing positively to reconstruction and therefore peacebuilding. This view was common amongst both international and local actors working within the mine action sector; these two select quotes highlight the majority of those views.

> Well, I think mine action contributes hugely especially when we go into these remote communities where they've had no outside assistance or very limited outside assistance. Quite often in these types of communities there is tension and conflict because there is nothing else for people to do. There's no job, there's no accompaniment and in the case of Somaliland for example, there are limited resources for land. Eventually there is potential and then we have organisations that go clearing when there's a task and for a number of months employ local people, the local economy is slightly better because there is money. Whether it is the deminers who go out to the shops and purchase food, and other items or the local people benefit because the agricultural land has been cleared and they can go by and start ploughing, or they can even graze their animals. So, you know all of this contributes to peacebuilding efforts. (Former deminer, mine clearance INGO)

> In terms of peacebuilding as one of the mine clearance NGO that is arguably the fourth or third largest employer in Somaliland. Having 400–800 men employed, getting busy every day,

> getting a salary is a huge benefit. So, in that way there is a little bit more justification of mine action as peacebuilding. (Senior UNMAS official)

This view was further reflected in a response to Lardner's (2008: 26) evaluation of one of mine clearance organisation's activities on livelihood; the observation was made that given the large number of staff over the particular programmes' ten years of mine action, it had undoubtedly contributed to societal benefits. Mine clearance organisations used the concept of operations referred to by Willet (2003: 56) as 'proximity demining', which meant that the staff were recruited locally to work on local tasks. This evaluation report supported the view of some of those interviewed that this benefited the communities from a financial perspective and appears to have had a positive impact to society in the parts of Somaliland where the sector operated.

In conclusion, therefore, we see that the historical turmoil that the country has gone through, and the efforts made to achieve stability, have shaped the way in which activities are perceived in Somaliland; this process and efforts and the resultant peace is locally owned. Peacebuilding was also seen primarily as activities that deal with conflict resolution. To the majority of the interviewees, peacebuilding could not be anything other than efforts towards the resolving of conflicts, as witnessed post-1991, and the continued role that is carried out by the elders in addressing everyday conflicts.

While mine action was initiated by community leaders, external actors have predominantly remained at the core. Thus, while there was acknowledgement that there are elements of mine action which can be seen contributing to peacebuilding, those interviewed delinked it from being a core peacebuilding activity. Thus, while the academic literature and actors have previously limited mine action to security, the link by those interviewed is tenuous and it is only linked to peacebuilding because of its ability to address other priority needs in society such as provision of employment. This limitation, I would argue, is because of the centrality of external actors as key drivers within mine action in contrast to the centrality of local community leaders in reconciliation related activities. The extent to why and how this limits the framing will be examined in the next section.

Thus, while the notions of peace are not beyond the statist, liberal peace that prevails in peacebuilding literature and that places the international actors at the core and local actors as having no agency misses the nuanced reality on the ground. As demonstrated, even for international actors working at the grassroots level, their understanding of local contexts indicates a departure in view from those who work in the political and bureaucratic frameworks in mainly headquarters or policy spaces; and also contradicts the dominant views of liberal peacebuilding. This contrasts with the way in which critics present international peacebuilders as a homogenous entity; the critiques suggest that their (international peacebuilders/interveners) notions of

peace and peacebuilding are in contrast with those of communities that they engage with.

What limits mine action's intrinsic peacebuilding potential?

This section returns to the key question that this paper sought to answer: why was mine action only narrowly understood or seen as peacebuilding, especially by communities, yet it addressed the key indicators of peace such as mobility, employment, safety and livelihoods? The historical context of Somaliland contributed to the limitation of the extent to which mine action is conceptualised within peacebuilding. Employing Goodhand's peace audit (peaceability) approach, mine action is viewed to have intrinsic peacebuilding outcomes as discerned in the immediate post-conflict period, when at the end of hostilities activities helped in reducing deaths and injuries and, most importantly, facilitated relative safety for the return of refugees and internally displaced. It provided an enabling environment for rebuilding economies, opened transportation routes and other infrastructure and, most importantly, it continues to be a source of employment.

While an everyday lens on mine action suggests a tenuous link to peacebuilding, this is not because of the liberal nature of the activity but a result of several processes, including that mine action is no longer a priority now that time has passed. Landmines and UXOs no longer have a prohibitive presence in Somaliland's landscape, thus while justifiably there was a great reduction in rates of new accidents and victims, this diminished the humanitarian role for mine action related activities, especially demining. Mine action has therefore become less central, and current programmes are expected to be more in support of development as is already the main role of demining in other places. Thus, the mine action sector is slowly realigning itself in order to continue to be relevant; this interaction remains minimal. The sector has engaged with activities beyond the traditional mine clearance role, increasing its peaceability potential.

Autesserre (2014: 53) suggests that the source of the problem also lies in the very act of imposition of the everyday practice of the interveners on the ground. I argue that the everyday modes of operation and behaviour are some of the factors that contributed to negative perceptions about mine action, hence diminishing the extent to which society can conceptualise mine action as peacebuilding. The peace audit methodologies call for and allow for a critical examination of practices of mine action actors, and also examine the way in which mine action is undertaken in Somaliland to understand how this has raised or lowered the probability for peace (Goodhand & Hulme 2000: 3).

Everyday practices of mine action actors

The informalities, ambiguities and contradictions that peacebuilding runs into reflect the political nature of the process. These become visible when examined from the everyday practices of the actors involved. Similarly, Autesserre (2014) observes that the social lives of international peacebuilders, in this case mine action actors, their personal relationships and their informal actions carry an enormous significance in post-conflict zones. Therefore, local populations comprehended mine action interventions through the daily activities of the sector actors on the ground, their contrasting lifestyles, values and behaviour—for example, arrogant or derogatory attitudes towards local populations were highlighted by many of those who were interviewed. These attitudes were perpetuated by little or no contact with local people, therefore building an air of arrogance by mine action actors. These attitudes were pointed out by the majority of the interviewees. I was also privy to conversations within the sector and the anecdotes exchanged during informal conversations about the sector—for example, members of the community highlighted that they saw mine action organisations only in their very badly driven vehicles, and only heard of them in relation to the various labour disputes that were on-going and that were reported in the local media. The drivers were seen to drive carelessly, which led to a number of road accidents, mainly involving the numerous livestock that roam around Hargeisa. The running joke amongst the expatriate community is that if these organisations hit a goat, the owner always insisted that the goat was a she goat and pregnant at the time (even where the goat is proven to be a 'he' goat). The cost of this was sometimes as high as $300 per goat.[13] This was because it happened all the time and the local communities learnt to take advantage of the numerous accidents and saw them as economic opportunities.

Similarly, the behaviour of the expat staff in general in Somaliland, and especially that of the employees of one mine action organisation, were often a subject of resentment. Thus, even where the values of the sector and its operations might not necessarily have contradicted their local views of the world, the baggage, modus operandi, technique and personal behaviour of expat mine action workers often did. Thus, for those interviewed, mine action employees were generally linked with the vilification of their organisations in the media and this overwhelmingly negative perception of their role at the local level contributed to a credibility crisis. This was also reflected by one senior programme manager who recalled being driven out of sites at gun point by the local communities, partly because there had been lack of communication with the communities and hence lack of appreciation of what each party expected.[14]

[13] Research diary notes.

[14] Research diary notes.

These negative perceptions were never addressed, and this could be attributed to the common approach of the operations of sector agencies' access to communities being widely through the relationships of their staff and partners with local power-holders. There was a failure to assess or monitor local perceptions of their presence and activities and their senior managers' direct presence on the ground was often limited. This may have meant that they remained largely unaware of how negatively they are viewed among the majority of their client populations.

There are several factors that determine this behaviour; and these are based on daily work routines driven by the securitised responses contexts within which mine action in Somaliland took place. These saw agencies harden themselves through strengthening protection and more readily adopting deterrence measures (Van Brabant 2010: 8), a process that came to be known as 'bunkerisation' or 'conflict proofing', and hence eschewing direct relations with local populations (Duffield 2012; Goodhand 2000) with implications which are outlined below.

Implications of 'bunkerisation' on communication

The most visible of these deterrence measures for the host community has been the widespread retreat of international aid workers into their own expatriate world of the UN and international NGO compounds and residential units that are fortified and inaccessible. Bunkered compounds restricted and protected movement and short deployments, all contributing to aid actors 'substituting acquaintance for knowledge, activity for understanding, reporting for analysis, [and] quantity of work for quality'. The routines dictated procedures which in turn continued to have an impact on how the perceptions of local communities emerged.

Similarly, the bunkerisation did not just create physical barriers but also made it difficult for the mine action sector actors to appreciate or understand the people and societies they were engaged with. This led to policies that contributed to the formation of hierarchies between local and international staff, and between international organisations and the communities they sought to serve.

Communication constraints as a result of the nature of mine action and bunkerisation

There was a lack of communication, whether explicitly or implicitly, about the sector's projects and a lack of clear information on what the sector was trying to achieve. The sector lacked any systematic or reliable approach to understanding or engaging with the interests and agendas of other stakeholders, a problem significantly compounded by the social and physical detachment and weak contextual knowledge of many sector workers, especially the decision makers within the organisations. The view of those

interviewed was that, generally, mine action organisations were very secretive. Such views were common, and I was constantly asked 'so what are those people doing?' whenever I mentioned that I was researching the role of mine clearance agencies.

Mine action has historically be seen as a secretive operation and, during the later life cycle of the programmes, it can be disconnected from the local community, a practice that created local grievances with the community. The secrecy is likely a carry-over that the sector has to overcome because of their reliance on personnel from a military background. Those employed by the UN on mine action related activities, and other mine action implementing organisations, largely rely on the same competence in advisory and leadership positions of former military personnel—and are therefore less different in orientation than their basic mandates might suggest. While national armies are the most common government body in terms of engagement in mine action, the sector previously sought military competence when recruiting internationally.[15] This explains the secrecy in carrying out their work, which contributes to a negative perception from the community towards mine action, which is seen as part of a western conspiracy. The majority of those interviewed perceived mine action as an activity that is shrouded in secrecy, externally driven (by foreigners) and not responsive to the immediate needs of the Somaliland people. Mine action workers being primarily ex-military meant that their motives were questioned by members of the communities that they are trying to help.

The lack of communication is not just with the local communities but also across the sector, as the relationships between the different mine action organisations and the UN were somewhat tepid. The organisations were reticent towards collaboration with others and amongst themselves. While this can be attributed to the nature of mine action, this contributed greatly to the cynicism regarding the role of mine action, thereby limiting the peaceability potential of the activity to peripheral activities that the sector undertakes as outlined below.

> I don't think these institutions responsible for the mine clearance are very sincere with what they are doing. I think it is some kind of business so that they stay here for long. Yes in 1991 you could hear that they are collecting some number of mines, explosive shells and they are exploding them somewhere so that you could see. Since 1995, or 1997, I have never heard of that. You see them having tents in agricultural areas with a line of stools with line making them white etc. (Director of an independent research institute in Hargeisa)

The nature of the mine action sector in perpetuating distrust

The lack of interaction with ordinary people, due in part to perceived security concerns, meant that the sector actors did not interact with the local people who might

[15] This still remains the practice because of the technical expertise in some roles within the sector.

have challenged the dominant ways of acting and suggested alternative solutions. The result of this was a culture of distrust between the mine action sector and local communities; however, the distrust was not entirely due to the disconnect but also due to the extent to which the sector was deemed sincere in their operations. For example, the time frame and goalposts of meeting the clearance targets constantly shifted. There were repeated claims that mines/UXOs had an impact on the livestock and agricultural sector and that minefields principally blocked agricultural and grazing land—two activities that forms the backbone of Somaliland's economy.[17] A claim that was repeatedly cited by mine action organisations in annual reports, on their websites and to donors was that while mines did create danger, any impact on livestock would have expected to raise concerns with the communities, relevant ministries or with the government in general; however, this was not the case, especially at the time of research. The livestock sector contributes to and accounts for more than 60 per cent of the GDP and 85 per cent of foreign exchange; 70 per cent of the population also finds employment from the sector. It would therefore follow that if mines still had an impact, this would have been a reason for concern at the time. According to an economist at the ministry, the impact of mines and UXOs on the economy in general or on livestock was not significant.

The sector did not seem to see the importance of informing the local communities about what was being done so that they could fully understand and appreciate what they were aiming for, especially since there was lack of visibility in information of explosive devices being destroyed. There was scepticism as to what the deminers were doing and aiming to achieve as previously mine clearance was always accompanied by public demolitions; as this was no longer the case, the perception of those interviewed was that there were indeed no mines and therefore no need for demining.

The lack of communication, the secrecy, the use of ex-military (as programme managers) and the diminishing need for mine clearance added to the commonly believed myth that the mine clearance organisations were actually placing mines in some of these areas in order to justify their existence.

> Some people even have the perception that the agencies are putting the mines because for as long as they have been doing demining, they should have cleared all by now. It is an overdue programme. (Senior NGO worker)

The issue here was that the impact of mines was no longer being felt as there were fewer accidents, and their impact was no longer curtailing movement, including that of animals as it had done previously. This was dramatically illustrated when I first visited a demining site just outside Hargeisa, Makadra demining task, in November 2012, where deminers were using heavy machinery but this did not appear to deter

[15] See more at: http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/somaliland#sthash.mxZPS4EA.dpuf, accessed 19 July 2021.

or hinder the daily activities undertaken by those living in and around the areas. The local people were grazing their animals and going about other normal activities with full view of the demining activities and with total disregard for 'safety' and/or whatever was going on in the vicinity.

The weakness of the sector became more about the culture of aid that reduced interaction, the behaviour of sector workers and the endemic distrust between the sector agencies. Among host populations, the negative cultural and organisational factors illuminated by the fact that mine action was no longer seen as a priority and the impact of the sector's intervention was perceived as limited and at times not visible.

Kurtenbach (2007) has argued that the way in which societies conceptualise peace, and therefore peacebuilding, is dependent on various factors, including the society itself, its history, cultural and social foundations, and the legacies of violence it has experienced. In the same way as societies do this, so would those intervening who have engaged in such contexts and therefore drawn from their conceptualisation based on the same. Thus, this negates the view that these interventions have failed due to contrasting notions of peace. This conclusion of the failure is based on the measure of whether a Weberian state has not been the outcome. A state centric approach also means there is a limited critical engagement on other issues such as mine action. These critiques do not engage in the nuanced acknowledgement of other factors that interact with the peacebuilding interventions to the extent that they would limit the efficacy and therefore peacebuilding outcomes of such activities.

Conclusion

Examining how community's lived experiences of conflicts and peacebuilding has shaped their narratives around the issues of peace and peacebuilding has grown from a critique of liberal approaches to peacebuilding, of which Somaliland is an example, but the idea of 'everyday peace' has not been examined in as much as the extent to which the exemplar of hybridity (Boege *et al.* 2009) vis a vis Somaliland has been. This paper therefore addresses this gap by demonstrating the applicability to Somaliland through an examination of the mine action sector.

While the academic literature and the interpretation of the Somaliland space locate mine action as having been central and facilitated peacebuilding, it is clear that this conceptualisation only remains as an academic exercise (external), which is in contrast with the views of both local actors and international actors who inhabit the mine action space in Somaliland. This demonstrates that views and sometimes instructions from capitals and headquarters do not automatically translate into views (in this case) or action in the field. The interveners are a diverse group with contrasting views, which do not reflect the policy statements. This article therefore

supports the argument for the need to break up the often-one-sided view of external actors. It supports the call to resist the conflating notion of a 'dominant peacebuilding culture' (Autesserre 2010) and argues for greater integration of different perspectives while considering the full spectrum of actors and activities that are involved in local-level peacebuilding efforts. As noted, just as the dynamics of war and peace on the ground are usually different from those at the level of the state (Autesserre 2010), so are the perceptions, conceptualisation and understanding of peace and peacebuilding.

Conceptualisation of peace and peacebuilding in Somaliland has been shaped by the context in which the state was founded, Somaliland's history and the conflict transformative process that has taken place. When one talks of peacebuilding in Somaliland, a number of assumptions are made—that peacebuilding is about reconciliation and state building (that is the reconstitution of the state from scratch), that peacebuilding is outside the remit of any external actors, and finally that peacebuilding is confined to the elders and government officials. Through using the case study of mine clearance as an external intervention, I have demonstrated how localised perceptions of peace and peacebuilding are not only articulated in different ways to top-down narratives but that external actors—such as mine clearance organisations—have a role in changing the perception of what local actors consider as peacebuilding. For mine action, this conceptualisation is informed by the sector actors, including their relationship with the communities, the sector's identity and values and, most importantly, the sector programmes. This then shapes the perceptions of the communities, and a narrative is formed based on the historical association with peacebuilding, sector behaviour and sector programmes. Evidently from the narratives, the mine action's 'peaceability' potential is increased by its intrinsic capacities that support peacebuilding and peacebuilding processes; however, the sector's behaviour limits that potential.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge funding by the African Leadership Centre through the Carnegie Foundation. This facilitated travel to attend and present this paper at the conference *Building Sustainable Peace: Ideas, Evidence, and Strategies*—an interdisciplinary conference on the state of the field of peace research and practice and the nexus between them, held on 7–10 November 2019, at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. I also wish to thank the journal's anonymous reviewers, and my colleague at HPG—ODI Oliver Lough for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. The standard disclaimers apply.

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To cite the article: Njeri, S. (2022), 'Examining mine action's "peaceability" potential through everyday narratives and practices in Somaliland', *Journal of the British Academy*, 10(s1): 109–133.
https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/010s1.109

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