

Review of the Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies, Edited by Charles Webel and Johan Galtung

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<p>Journal Volume & Issue: Vol. 6, No. 2 (August 2025) PP. 152-164 DOI: https://doi.org/10.46404/panjogov.v6i2.6558</p> <p>Received: 27 March 2025 Revised: 09 August 2025 Accepted: 27 August 2025 Published: 31 August 2025</p>  <p>Copyright: ©2025 by Jimma University, Ethiopia. Under Open Access Journal, the creative common attribute 4.0 international license permits any interested person to copy, redistribute, remix, transmit and adapt the work provided that the original work and source is appropriately cited.</p>	<p><i>Through combining theoretical models with empirical case studies, the Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies provides an in-depth exploration of peace and conflict resolution. To assess the contributions of the handbook, this review utilizes a critical analysis approach that incorporates both qualitative and comparative methods. Three specific criteria are employed to appraise the book: (i) theoretical contributions, which examine interaction with both classic and contemporary theories, including Lederach's (1997) approaches to peacebuilding and Galtung's (1969) understanding of violence; (ii) empirical validity, which assesses the case studies for methodological robustness and geographic diversity; and (iii) practical relevance, which examines its applicability for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. This review concludes that the handbook serves as a comprehensive and multidisciplinary resource, demonstrating strong theoretical insight and a grassroots perspective. Nonetheless, it is limited by case studies that focus primarily on Europe, the use of complex language, and the absence of a formal abstract, all of which could pose challenges for novice readers. Future editions could enhance their value by simplifying the language, incorporating additional case studies from Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and offering practical policy suggestions. Despite these limitations, the handbook remains a vital resource for peace and conflict studies, effectively addressing the complexities of international conflicts while connecting theory with practice.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Grassroots Movements, International Organizations, Structural Violence</i></p>
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Introduction

Overview of the Contents of the Book

The theoretical and practical aspects of peace and conflict resolution are explored in a comprehensive manner in the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*. Key topics like conflict causes, peacebuilding ideas, and conflict resolution techniques are covered throughout the book's multiple topical sections. It explores the complexities of violence by categorizing it into direct, structural, and cultural violence, drawing on Johan Galtung's seminal works (Galtung, 1969). Additionally, the book examines the role of international organizations, non-governmental actors, and grassroots movements in peace processes. Case studies are incorporated to provide empirical grounding, enhancing the applicability of theoretical concepts to real-world conflicts.

Despite its strengths, the book presents certain empirical and theoretical gaps. Empirically, while the book incorporates various case studies, its coverage is uneven, with a stronger focus on Eurocentric and North American conflicts, while less attention is given to conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. The book's application to comprehending localized peacebuilding initiatives in underrepresented regions is limited by this geographical imbalance (Richmond, 2011). Furthermore, it is challenging to evaluate the sustainability of peace processes over time because the empirical data sometimes lack a longitudinal perspective. The book's capacity to offer insights on the longevity of conflict resolution techniques would be improved by the inclusion of more dynamic, long-term research (Autesserre, 2014).

Although *The Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* delves deeply into the fundamental theories of peace studies, it falls short in incorporating newer viewpoints that have become more popular recently. The book's capacity to represent the changing landscape of peace research is hampered by the notable under-examination of feminist peace theory, decolonial peacebuilding, and indigenous approaches to conflict resolution (Tickner, 2001; Boege et al., 2009). For instance, feminist peace theory highlights how gendered experiences shape conflict and peacebuilding and challenge conventional, male-dominated security discourses (Enloe, 2014). The impact of the book on addressing gender-related dimensions of violence and peace processes, which are widely recognized as crucial components of sustainable peace efforts, is lessened by the absence of these perspectives (Cockburn, 2013).

In a similar vein, decolonial peacebuilding perspectives challenge Eurocentric conflict resolution methods by highlighting the historical impacts of colonialism on present-day conflicts. These perspectives prioritize resistance movements and local knowledge as vital elements of peacebuilding efforts (Mignolo, 2011; Richmond, 2016). Instead of focusing on state-centric and international bodies, there is a significant oversight of grassroots, community-based, and indigenous peace practices that have proven effective in various contexts (Mac Ginty, 2011). Approaches to conflict resolution rooted in indigenous perspectives, emphasizing restorative justice, reconciliation, and collective decision-making, present alternative paths to sustainable peace that deserve greater attention (Boege et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the book suggests that state actors and international entities are the primary agents in peace initiatives. However, emerging research highlights the increasing role of non-state actors and hybrid governance structures, such as grassroots movements, local peace committees, and faith-based organizations, in fostering sustainable peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). By incorporating these newer frameworks, the book could broaden its theoretical relevance and applicability to a variety of conflict scenarios in current peace and conflict studies discussions.

The Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies, edited by Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, stands as a foundational text in the field, offering an in-depth exploration of both theoretical and practical dimensions of conflict resolution. This review critically evaluates the handbook's contributions while underscoring its interdisciplinary advantages, empirical findings, and practical significance. It also points out shortcomings regarding the handbook's accessibility, geographical focus, and the inclusion of emerging viewpoints, such as feminist, decolonial, and indigenous perspectives. Grounded in Galtung's (1969) pioneering work, the handbook delves into the complexities of violence by categorizing it into direct, structural, and cultural forms. Through the examination of real-world examples, it sheds light on the roles played by grassroots movements, NGOs, and international organizations within peace processes. Despite its comprehensive scope, the handbook's effectiveness is limited by its focus on Western-centric conflicts and its intricate theoretical language. This assessment considers the book's relevance to contemporary issues and proposes suggestions for enhancing its global applicability.

Objective of Reviewing the Book

The objective of this review is to explore the theoretical contributions, empirical findings, and practical applications of the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* in the realm of peace and conflict resolution. To evaluate the handbook's assertions, methodologies, and practical uses, this review employs thematic content analysis, qualitative assessment, and comparative contextual analysis. It aims to determine the effectiveness of the book in addressing contemporary challenges, such as ongoing violent conflicts, the roles of non-state actors, and the limitations of international interventions. Furthermore, it examines how emerging perspectives, including decolonial approaches, post-liberal peace, and conflict transformation, can be incorporated (Richmond, 2011; Boege et al., 2009). In doing so, the assessment identifies gaps in geographical coverage and the lack of representation of voices from women, indigenous communities, and grassroots organizations, thereby measuring the handbook's relevance for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners (Tickner, 2001; Mac Ginty, 2011). By analyzing its arguments and methodologies, this review sheds light on both the book's scholarly contributions and its limitations. It also provides recommendations for future editions aimed at enhancing analytical depth and practical relevance.

The primary aim of this review is to evaluate the book's significance for scholars, policymakers, and professionals engaged in diplomacy and conflict resolution. It appraises whether the book presents innovative frameworks for sustainable peacebuilding, considering the increasing complexity of modern conflicts characterized by resource-driven disputes, transnational dangers, and ongoing intra-state violence (Autesserre, 2014). Moreover, it underscores the book's weaknesses, particularly concerning its geographical scope and the representation of marginalized groups in peace efforts, such as women, indigenous peoples, and grassroots organizations (Tickner, 2001; Mac Ginty, 2011).

Consequently, this review seeks to offer insights into the scholarly contributions and shortcomings of the book by critically analyzing its arguments, approaches, and theoretical premises. It also proposes ways to enhance the analytical depth and relevance of subsequent editions. Ultimately, this review aims to assist scholars, decision-makers, and students in evaluating the book's worth as a valuable resource for understanding and addressing today's peace and conflict challenges.

Core Arguments and Key Information

A multidisciplinary perspective on understanding and addressing conflicts is highlighted in the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, which incorporates insights from various social disciplines (Webel & Galtung, 2007). It underscores the importance of structural reforms to achieve sustainable peace and distinguishes between conflict resolution and transformation (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Unlike traditional state-focused views, it stresses the role of local actors and grassroots organizations in the peacebuilding process (Beriker, 2008; Byrne et al., 2019). The field of conflict analysis and resolution (CAR) is characterized as focusing on uncovering root causes and developing intervention strategies (Sandole et al., 2008). Recent developments in peace studies include discussions on racialized peacebuilding, the impact of gender on conflict, locally-owned peacebuilding approaches, and the involvement of youth in peace efforts (Byrne et al., 2019). Additionally, there is a critical assessment of the effectiveness of international institutions in maintaining peace (Webel & Galtung, 2007; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016).

One of the primary themes of the book is the distinction between conflict transformation and conflict resolution. It emphasizes the need for deeper structural reforms, such as addressing historical wrongs, economic disparities, and systemic violence to achieve lasting peace, contrasting with conventional conflict resolution methods that focus on short-term ceasefires and negotiated agreements (Lederach, 1997). This perspective aligns with Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace, which goes beyond merely the absence of overt violence to include the elimination of structural and cultural violence that perpetuates conflicts over time.

Another key topic is the significance of local actors and grassroots organizations in peacebuilding. By emphasizing the importance of bottom-up approaches, the book challenges the traditional state-centric model of conflict resolution. Research has shown that local peacebuilding initiatives, which are rooted in the needs and experiences of affected communities, often have higher success rates in fostering enduring peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Autesserre (2014) argues that this is particularly relevant in post-conflict environments where state institutions are fragile, and local communities may reject international interventions.

Ngowi, E.E., Jesse, A.M., *Review of the Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies, Edited by...*

The effectiveness of international organizations, particularly the United Nations, in conflict prevention and peace maintenance is also scrutinized in this text. The authors critically assess the UN's bureaucratic challenges, political limitations, and its struggle to adapt to contemporary conflicts, such as asymmetric warfare and the participation of non-state actors, while acknowledging the organization's contribution to conflict mediation and peacekeeping operations (Paris, 2004). These critiques correspond with broader discussions regarding the necessity to reform international governance systems to make them more flexible in addressing evolving conflict scenarios (Richmond & Franks, 2009).

An interdisciplinary approach is emphasized in the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, which integrates viewpoints from international relations, political science, sociology, and psychology (Webel & Galtung, 2007). It distinguishes between conflict resolution and transformation, advocating for structural changes to achieve sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997). For example, Chapter 3 by Galtung explores the concept of positive peace, addressing structural and cultural violence, supported by case studies like the Northern Ireland peace process (Webel & Galtung, 2007, pp. 45-60). The handbook underscores the role of grassroots organizations, challenging state-centric views, as seen in Chapter 8's analysis of local peace committees in South Africa (Webel & Galtung, 2007, pp. 123-140). Recent developments include gendered aspects of conflict and youth involvement, though these are less prominent (Byrne et al., 2019).

While individual chapters, such as Chapter 5 on mediation techniques, are robust, the handbook lacks a final synthesizing chapter to connect diverse perspectives, leaving readers to integrate findings independently. This fragmentation slightly undermines the book's cohesion, a common challenge in edited volumes. The critique of international institutions, notably the United Nations (Chapter 12, Webel & Galtung, 2007, pp. 200-215), highlights bureaucratic limitations but could further explore their adaptability to asymmetric warfare (Paris, 2004).

The handbook underrepresents indigenous conflict resolution practices, such as restorative justice in Sub-Saharan African communities (e.g., ubuntu-based reconciliation in Rwanda) or Southeast Asian mediation traditions (Boege et al., 2009). Including these perspectives would enhance its global applicability, complementing its discussion of decolonial peacebuilding (Mignolo, 2011).

Importance of the Arguments and Justifications

The arguments and justifications in *The Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* are highly significant for advancing scholarship and practice in peace and conflict studies. The book's interdisciplinary approach enriches the analysis of conflict dynamics, integrating perspectives from political science, sociology, psychology, and international relations, making it an essential framework for researchers and practitioners (Webel & Galtung, 2007). The differentiation between conflict resolution and conflict transformation is a significant contribution, highlighting the reasons why many peace efforts fall short: an excessive focus on ceasefires instead of tackling systemic violence and historical injustices (Galtung, 1969; Lederach, 1997). The book effectively argues for the importance of grassroots participation, aligning with contemporary views that highlight the significance of local efforts in sustainable peacebuilding (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016). By prioritizing bottom-up methods, the book supports the empirical observation that peace initiatives led by local actors often surpass those that are externally imposed (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Additionally, a critical evaluation of international entities, including the UN and regional organizations, reveals both their strengths and weaknesses, providing a well-rounded perspective on global peace efforts (Richmond, 2005). In light of today's geopolitical climate, where the effectiveness of foreign interventions is under scrutiny, this approach is particularly significant. Consequently, the book offers both theoretical insight and practical importance by tackling these crucial issues, establishing it as an essential resource for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners dedicated to achieving enduring peace.

The handbook's multidisciplinary perspective enriches conflict analysis by synthesizing various viewpoints, resulting in a robust framework for academics and practitioners alike (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Chapter 3 distinguishes between conflict resolution and transformation, which aids in comprehending why numerous peace processes are unsuccessful due to lingering structural issues (Galtung, 1969; Lederach, 1997). Supporting Chapter 8's focus on grassroots involvement, evidence indicates that local initiatives tend to be more effective than external actions (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The critique of international organizations presented in Chapter 12 is relevant given the current debates surrounding global governance reforms (Richmond, 2005). However, a

Ngowi, E.E., Jesse, A.M., *Review of the Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies, Edited by...*
deeper exploration of emerging topics such as gender dimensions (Tickner, 2001) and conflicts driven by climate change (Salehyan, 2008) would enhance its relevance today.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Book

The *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* stands out for its comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspective, incorporating a range of theoretical approaches and real-world case studies. One notable contribution is Johan Galtung's (2007) framework for understanding structural and cultural violence, which provides a critical insight into the nature of conflict dynamics. Additionally, Lederach's (2007) emphasis on conflict transformation offers valuable perspectives on sustainable peacebuilding strategies. The book effectively supports its arguments with case studies that illustrate the application of peace theories in practice, such as the impact of grassroots initiatives on conflict resolution (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Its scholarly merit is further bolstered by a balanced critique of peace processes, recognizing both their strengths and weaknesses.

Nonetheless, the book does exhibit several significant shortcomings. Its complex theoretical discussions and dense language present challenges for practitioners or general readers who lack a robust academic background in peace studies. Certain sections might also limit accessibility as they assume prior knowledge of peace research frameworks, particularly those addressing advanced conflict analysis techniques (Beriker, 2007). Additionally, there is a noticeable imbalance in the geographical representation within the case studies. While the book covers conflicts in various nations, it predominantly reflects Western perspectives, with regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia receiving insufficient attention (Byrne et al., 2019). A more globally inclusive approach could enhance its relevance to a broader range of conflict scenarios. Furthermore, although the book discusses policy interventions theoretically, it does not offer specific, doable policy ideas that could help practitioners and policymakers carry out peace tactics successfully. By including additional case studies from a wider range of geographical areas and providing more precise, helpful advice for efforts at conflict resolution, future editions could fill in these gaps.

The handbook's merits are found in its thorough, multidisciplinary approach, which incorporates important ideas such as Lederach's (2007) conflict transformation and Galtung's (2007) structural

violence (Chapters 3 and 6, respectively). Empirical support is given by case studies, such as the peace process in South Africa (Chapter 8). There may be some repetition, too, as some chapters, such as Chapter 5 on mediation, overlap with Chapter 7's comparable ideas. Thematic coherence is diminished in the absence of a synthesis editorial chapter.

The handbook's relevance to underrepresented countries like Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia is limited by its Eurocentric perspective, which predominantly uses case studies from Western contexts (e.g., Northern Ireland, Chapter 10). Examples of ways to close this gap include Rwanda's gacaca courts and Indonesia's adat-centered reconciliation (Boege et al., 2009). Accessibility is hindered by the theoretical complexity found in sections like Chapter 4 on conflict analysis, which assumes the reader has prior understanding (Beriker, 2007). Additionally, the practical applicability of the handbook is restricted due to the lack of concrete policy suggestions.

Table 1: Key Themes and Case Studies

Theme	Case Study	Region	Reference
Structural Violence	Northern Ireland	Europe	Chapter 10, Webel & Galtung (2007)
Grassroots Peacebuilding	South Africa	Africa	Chapter 8, Webel & Galtung (2007)
Indigenous Reconciliation	Rwanda (Gacaca Courts)	Africa	Boege et al. (2009)

The global significance could be enhanced by broadening the case study analysis to include Southeast Asia (for example, Indonesia's adat mediation) and Sub-Saharan Africa (such as Rwanda's gacaca courts) (Byrne et al., 2019). The connection between theory and practice can be strengthened through practical policy recommendations like establishing regional peace committees or integrating indigenous mediation within national frameworks (Beriker, 2007). To ensure the handbook retains its relevance amid a shifting global landscape, future reviewers should assess emerging paradigms such as digital diplomacy and environmental peacebuilding (Conca, 2015; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2018). While the handbook is theoretically robust, its effectiveness is hindered by the absence of a synthesis chapter and limited focus on feminist and decolonial perspectives (Tickner, 2001; Mignolo, 2011). For upcoming editions to maintain significance both in academic circles and practical applications, these shortcomings need to be thoroughly addressed.

Recommendations for Future Readers and Reviewers

For scholars, students, and professionals engaged in peace research and conflict resolution, the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* serves as an invaluable tool. However, due to its theoretical complexity, those less familiar with the field might benefit from exploring additional texts such as Lederach's *The Moral Imagination* (2005) and Galtung's *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996) to grasp foundational concepts like structural violence and conflict transformation. Webel and Galtung's *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* (2007) is also beneficial for readers seeking a more profound understanding, as it further clarifies theories of peace and techniques for conflict resolution.

With its strong interdisciplinary framework and empirical insights, the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* is a crucial contribution to the field of peace studies. The intricate language, limited engagement with indigenous perspectives, and Eurocentric bias somewhat offset its advantages in theoretical richness and grassroots focus. By addressing these shortcomings, the guidebook could enhance its status as a key text and improve its accessibility and global relevance.

Future editions of the book could become more approachable by simplifying theoretical discussions, particularly in sections covering advanced conflict analysis techniques (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Although certain theoretical discussions can be enlightening, they may be challenging for practitioners and non-academic audiences to grasp. The content could be made more accessible for diverse readers by utilizing clearer language and incorporating conceptual models or visual aids.

The book's international relevance and applicability could be strengthened by expanding the case study selection to encompass a broader range of conflict areas, particularly from underrepresented regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia (Byrne et al., 2019). Though less frequently spotlighted than conflicts in the Middle East and the West, many contemporary struggles in these regions offer significant insights for peacebuilding. Including case studies highlighting community-led reconciliation efforts, indigenous mediation practices, and local peace initiatives would present a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective.

Furthermore, adding more actionable policy recommendations could bridge the divide between theoretical models and actual peacebuilding practices, offering policymakers, mediators, and grassroots activists clearer guidance (Beriker, 2007). To enhance its functional utility in real-world scenarios, it would be advantageous to incorporate organized sections that outline step-by-step strategies for peace negotiations, conflict transformation, and post-conflict recovery.

Future reviewers should critically assess the book's evolving theoretical perspectives and explore how emerging paradigms for peacebuilding, such as digital diplomacy and environmental peacebuilding, could be integrated into subsequent editions (Conca, 2015; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2018). Given the increasing influence of technology and climate change on conflict dynamics, the book would benefit from commentary on how digital forums shape peace processes and how environmental factors either intensify or alleviate conflicts.

Despite its limitations, the *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies* remains a pivotal and necessary resource for peace studies. By offering comprehensive insights into the complex nature of conflict and peacebuilding, the book helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Its interdisciplinary approach, which draws from fields such as political science, sociology, and international relations, provides readers with a variety of perspectives on peace and conflict resolution, making it an invaluable resource for academics, students, and practitioners alike (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2016). The book serves as an essential guide for those involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts, as it combines theoretical discussions with real-life case studies to enhance its academic rigor and provide practical applications of the concepts discussed.

Despite its strengths, the book could be further enhanced by incorporating recent advancements in modern peacebuilding to ensure it remains relevant in a rapidly evolving world. One significant area to consider is the increasing impact of environmental factors on war and peace processes. As climate change accelerates and environmental pressures intensify, conflicts over natural resources and degradation are expected to rise. The framework of the book could be enriched by including insights from the emerging field of environmental peacebuilding (Conca, 2015), aligning it with current research that underscores the link between environmental security and conflict resolution.

Ngowi, E.E., Jesse, A.M., *Review of the Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies, Edited by...*

Moreover, as digital technologies play a larger role in global conflict dynamics, the book could benefit from an examination of digital diplomacy and cyber peacebuilding. The growth of social media, digital activism, and online initiatives for peace has dramatically transformed the conflict resolution landscape (Björkdahl & Gusic, 2018). These novel approaches warrant academic scrutiny, particularly as cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns have become significant tools in modern conflicts.

The handbook is a crucial resource for scholars, students, and practitioners alike. New readers may find it helpful to refer to additional works such as Galtung's **Peace by Peaceful Means** (1996) and Lederach's **The Moral Imagination** (2005) to better understand foundational ideas. Future editions should aim to clarify theoretical discussions by utilizing diagrams to illustrate concepts such as structural violence (Webel & Galtung, 2007).

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