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Roundtable Review 17-11

Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*. Manchester University Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781526168979.

Contents

Introduction by Paul F. Diehl, Independent Scholar

Over the past decade, there has been renewed interest in the conceptual specification of "peace," and in measuring concepts of it. The result is a significant number of new formulations.[1] These represent significant extensions and modifications of Johan Galtung's formulations of negative and positive peace that for decades dominated academic discourse.[2] With any new concept, there is a period of critique and reformulation from other scholars. A second step is the empirical application of the concepts. This can take the form of new data sets as well as large-N and case studies anchored in the conceptual frameworks. As a consequence, there is often a recursive loop back to the original conceptual components for assessment and new pathways forward in the empirical realm. The publication of this book and the critiques in this forum are reflective of that process.

The initial publication of the conceptual framework[3] set the stage for the present collection. The major contributions of the framework were two-fold. First, and as the title of this book emphasizes, it assumes that peace is *relational*, that is, one must evaluate peace (or its absence, or its degree) for one actor vis-à-vis another actor. Thus, there should be no sense that an actor, group, or country is peaceful (or not) in the aggregate, but rather that peace depends on their specific relationship with others. Hence, attempts to place one peace score or measure on a given actor, such as that by the Global Peace Index,[4] are misleading and indeed inaccurate. Second, the framework is designed to apply to a wide range of relationships and at multiple levels of analysis. Thus, it can apply to state, group, or individual relationships, giving it potential analytical power to synthesize our understanding of peace.

The commentators in this forum, Louis Kriesberg, Terrence Lyons, and Emma Murphy, offer positive assessments of the book and its contributions. In particular, they praise the relational approach as "novel" and more "nuanced" that prior peace conceptualizations that are binary or otherwise simplistic. The framework also has the ability to capture both the conflictual and peaceful characteristics of relationships (Lyons), rather than focusing exclusively on one or the other. The commentators also note the value of the case studies in the collection, specifically in terms of different conflict types, geography, and other contextual attributes; such diversity illustrates the broad utility of the relational peace approach. Nevertheless, they converge on a number of points about the limitations of the framework, both conceptually and as revealed by the applications to case studies.

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[1] For a review, see Simon Pierre Boulanger Martel, Anna Jarstad, Elisabeth Olivius, Johanna Söderström, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, and Malin Åkebo, "Peace with Adjectives: Conceptual Fragmentation or Conceptual Innovation?" *International Studies Review* 26:2 (2024): 1-23; Paul F. Diehl, "Peace: A Conceptual Survey," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2023): https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.515.

[2] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6:3 (1969): 167-191.

[3] Johanna Söderström, Malin Åkebo, and Anna Jarstad, "Friends, Fellows, and Foes: A New Framework for Studying Relational Peace," *International Studies Review* 23:3 (2021): 484-508.

[4] Vision of Humanity, *Global Peace Index*, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/.

As noted above, the relational peace framework avoids the trap of assessing peace for an actor as a whole in favor of how that actor relates to another actor. This dyadic approach is an improvement, but the three commentators identify a series of concerns. Analysts typically look at a conflict as the unit of analysis; nevertheless, there are often multiple dyadic relationships embedded in it. Murphy argues that analysts would need to look beyond singular dyadic relationships, suggesting that ignoring some pairs of actors could lead to wrong conclusions. Kriesberg concurs with the claim that considering multiple dyads might be essential for understanding progress toward peace. Yet, does one need to consider all relationships in a conflict and treat them equally? Lyons raises the issue of identifying which of the relationships is or are the most important to understand conflict dynamics and possible pathways to peace.

Related to the issue of multiple relationships is how they are interconnected or interdependent in a given conflict, a concern raised by Lyons. There is a debate in international relations studies about whether the dyadic approach to analysis is the best method or whether a network approach, which provides a framework to link multiple relationships, is the way to understand conflicts or international interactions more broadly.[5] Based on the case studies in the book and the use of dyadic relationships more generally, Kriesberg argues that the framework is more effective for analyzing civil wars than for interstate ones, although multiple dyads are more common in civil conflicts, especially in the most frequent forms of armed conflict, that is, internationalized civil conflicts.[6]

In their response, the editors note that the dyadic approach makes the analysis of relations more manageable, but they also do not dispute that more complex relationships exist in some conflicts. Indeed, they argue that the framework does not preclude interconnected relations and support a consideration of the dynamics across multiple relationships and across time, which can be facilitated by the relational peace approach.

A second area of concern for the commentators is "non-domination" as a conceptual component of relational peace, which means that a friendly relationship should not involve one actor dominating or imposing their preferences on the other actor. Lyons is skeptical about non-domination being possible in any relationship given that power asymmetry is present in most relationships. Indeed, Murphy notes the lack of clear-cut examples of non-domination in the case studies throughout the book. Kriesberg finds that this element is not discussed as extensively as it should have been in the cases.

The editors strongly push back on this critique, and defend the inclusion of non-domination in the peace definition. They indicate that the non-domination criterion does not suggest the complete absence of power asymmetry as might be implied by the commentators. Rather, they argue, some power differential is

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[5] See Skyler J. Cranmer and Bruce A. Desmarais, "A Critique of Dyadic Design," *International Studies Quarterly* 60:2 (2016): 355-362; Paul F. Diehl and Thorin Wright, "A Conditional Defense of the Dyadic Approach," *International Studies Quarterly* 60: 2 (2016): 363-368.

[6] Shawn Davies, Therése Pettersson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Magnus Öberg, "Organized Violence 1989–2024, and the Challenges of Identifying Civilian Victims," *Journal of Peace Research* 62:4 (2025): 1223-1240.

to be expected and hence the chapters do not show their complete absence. Indeed, non-domination is clarified by the editors to be a matter of degree along a continuum rather than something absent or present.

The eight case studies represent a wide range of conflicts and geographic contexts: Russia, Cambodia, South Africa, Cyprus, Myanmar, Colombia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. As useful as any framework might be, it is always the fact that some cases fit better than others—Murphy makes this point in her critique. Kriesberg's argument about civil versus interstate wars is applicable here as well. The editors express no surprise at such evaluations. On the one hand, they acknowledge the difficulties and tradeoffs needed when formulating a framework that applies to such a wide variety of contexts and levels of analysis. Some slippage is inevitable, and the editors rightly point to the need for authors to have deep contextual knowledge of the cases they analyze with the framework. This is sage advice for scholars when they import any theoretical framework or argument.

Murphy argues that the chapters slip into treating the framework as an ideal against which to measure peace in the context at hand rather than using the framework as explanatory model. This might be because, as Kriesberg indicates, the framework needs an explanation for the process of change. Yet this might be too high a bar for any conceptual specification. The editors agree, noting that the purpose is descriptive rather than explanatory or prescriptive. Indeed, one of the values of this framework is that it allows space for discourse and theorizing from a diverse set of viewpoints from rational choice approaches to critical theory ones. The concluding part of their response offers some key questions about causal processes that might be pursued, but whose answers or directions are not dictated or constrained by their framework.

Case studies expose prospective limitations and omissions in the original framework, and the commentators identify several of these. One is that "layers" of relationships exist between actors (Murphy) and that ideas about a conflict matter in those relationships (Kriesberg). Applications of the framework also require multiple forms of data and information (Murphy). Because the editors aspired to create a general framework, they again note that their approach does not privilege any kind of data or exclude multiple and intersecting levels of analysis.

One of the hallmarks of an important work is the degree to which it provokes critiques, invites reformulation, and ultimately opens pathways for future research in ways that enhance knowledge and promote new insights. The present work easily fulfills those criteria, and the three commentators and the editors elucidate those elements in the essays that follow.

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Anna Jarstad is Professor of Political Science at the Department of Government, Uppsala University. Her research focuses on power-sharing arrangements in divided societies, as well as international and grassroots peacebuilding, and post-war democratization. Apart from quantitative analysis, her work draws on field work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Kosovo, New Zealand, North Macedonia, and South Africa. She is the co-editor of *From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), together with Timothy D. Sisk, and leads the Varieties of Peace network. Her work is published in journals such as *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *Democratization*, *Global Governance*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Peace & Change*, *Africa Spectrum*, and *Civil War*.

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Louis Kriesberg is Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Maxwell Professor Emeritus of Social Conflict Studies at Syracuse University. He was the founding Director of the Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts (PARC), 1986–1994. After becoming Professor Emeritus in 1997, he remained Research Associate at PARC. He has published 30 authored or edited books and 110 articles or book chapters. His recent books are: *Realizing Peace: A Constructive Conflict Approach* (Oxford University Press, 2015); *Pioneer in Peace and Constructive Conflict Resolution Studies* (Springer, 2016), with Bruce W. Dayton *Constructive Conflicts* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022, 6th ed.), and *Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America* (Oxford University Press, 2024). He continues his interest in constructive conflicts, within and between societies. Currently, he is doing research and reporting about right-wing populism.

Terrence Lyons is Professor of Conflict Resolution at the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University. He received his PhD from Johns Hopkins University and was a Fellow at the Brookings Institution and the Peace Research Institute, Oslo. His research focuses on politics after war and comparative peace processes. Among his publications are *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics* (Lynne Rienner, 2019); "Peace Implementation and Quality Peace" (Routledge, 2018); and *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks* (Hurst, 2012).

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Review by Louis Kriesberg, Syracuse University

This is an important book. It is the product of many years of collaboration, particularly among the editors. The book focuses on the relatively neglected subject of the degree of peace reached by adversaries after a violent conflict between them has ended in various ways. The authors are correct in noting the limitation of the idea that peace is simply the absence of war, or of assuming the existence of only negative peace (the absence of violence) or positive peace (presence of social justice). They offer a different, more nuanced approach, which examines the unique features of the relationship between the protagonists of peacemaking after their violent conflict has ended.

The editors, Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, present a complex framework for assessing degrees and kinds of peacefulness between the protagonists in the prior violent conflict.[1] Then, eight empirical chapters seek to apply the indicators of peacefulness in the framework of assessing relational peace practices. The eight chapters are quite diverse in terms of their research methods, the location of the conflict, the degrees of violence, and current peacefulness. In the concluding chapter, the editors assess the utility of the framework, discuss policies to increase peacefulness, and point to needed future work. This is an ambitious undertaking and is substantially successful.[2]

Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo have developed a complex systematic framework of practices between adversarial parties, revealing different degrees of the quality of peacemaking. This relational-peace framework incorporates multiple actions in the relations of non-official as well as official actors who were previously engaged in or subjected to a violent conflict. There are three primary components of the framework: behavioral interactions, subjective attitudes, and ideas of the relationship. Each component has elements that vary in their degree of peacefulness. Behavioral interaction has three elements of increasing peacefulness: non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation. Subjective attitudes include the two elements of recognition and trust. Ideas of the relationship also has two elements: being fellows or being friends. They argue that some degree of these elements must occur for a degree of relational peace to be achieved.

The eight following chapters are empirical studies related to the relational-peace framework. Most of the chapters focus on the relations between people from opposing sides in a prior violent conflict, using various kinds of data, such as interviews, observations, and newspaper accounts. The analyses of such dyadic relations in very diverse geographical areas are interesting, as well as helpful in understanding shifts in degrees of peacefulness. The dyads examined in the book vary in terms of the intensity of the conflict in which the dyad members were or are engaged. Significantly, participation by non-governmental parties in

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[1] Anna K. Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, "Introduction: Conceptualizing and Studying Relational Peace Practices," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices.* (Manchester University Press, 2023): 1-26.

[2] Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, "Relational Peace Practices Moving Forward," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 221-240.

peace negotiations is presently becoming more frequent. New systematic research finds that peace agreements are more durable when civil society also participates in the peace negotiations.[3]

In chapter 1, the first empirical chapter, by Niklas Eklund, Malin Eklund Wimelius, and Jörgen Elfving examine the Russian view of peace over the extensive region of Russia, Transnistria, Abkhazia, Georgia, and Moldova.[4] They use open Russian sources, Russian governmental publications, and academic as well as popular texts to discern that Russians view this as one region. While this elitist view is interesting, the authors do not discuss it as a particular idea for one or two parties in a dyad, nor does the essay focus on relational peace for any particular dyad, as the subsequent chapters do.

In the second chapter Johanna Söderström focuses on relational peace among elites in Cambodia, which had suffered greatly under Khmer Rouge rule, 1975–1979.[5] The Vietnamese army overthrew the Khmer Rouge government, but a civil war ensued until a peace treaty was signed in 1991. Political disorder persisted, with foreign interventions as well. Söderström deems elite relations as important in reaching many peace agreements. Local and international newspapers serve as her sources of information about the relational peace practices of the elites. She found elements in the three primary components of the framework: behavioral interactions, subjective attitudes, and ideas of the relationship. Among many findings, she concludes that imbalances in power occur among Cambodian elite dyads as well as elements in the three primary components of the framework (behavioral interactions, subjective attitudes, and ideas of the relationship). The power imbalances resulted in domination in the interaction within the dyad. This is a significant addition to the framework presented in the first chapter.

The third chapter, by Jarstad, involves intergroup relations in South Africa after apartheid officially ended.[6] Initially, the notion emerged that South Africa was a Rainbow Nation with many different peoples, but that was soon replaced by nationalism. Jarstad notes that celebrating diversity is one path to building a nation after a major civic conflict, while the other path is emphasizing nationalism, which is more problematic. This exemplifies the relevance of ideas about relational peace. Because several other chapters note the importance of ideas about the conflict, this is important.

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[3] Esra Cuhadar and Daniel Druckman, "Let the People Speak! What Kind of Civil Society Inclusion Leads to Durable Peace?" *International Studies Perspectives* 25:3 (2023): 359-381.

[4] Niklas Eklund, Malin Eklund Wimelius, and Jörgen Elfving, "Russian Ideas of Peace and Peacekeeping," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*, 27-50.

[5] Söderström, "Relational Peace Practices among Elites in Cambodia?" in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 51-73.

[6] Jarstad, "At the End of the Rainbow: Intergroup Relations in South Africa," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*, 74-101.

The fourth chapter, by Jason Klocek, focuses on dyads among the leaders of the Greek Cypriot community and dyads of Cypriot Turkish and Greek elites.[7] His research data draws from historical documents, public opinion surveys, policy reports, field work, and archival documents both in the United Kingdom and Cyprus. Cyprus has been the location of a notoriously intractable conflict. Klocek notes the importance of domination rather than non-domination within the Greek community and in the Turkish-Greek dyads. This is an important matter because domination is related to power imbalance, an issue to which other chapters refer but which is not discussed in the presentation of the framework.

In chapter 5, Elizabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström report on their 2019 study of two states in Myanmar.[8] A semi-civilian government had started reform efforts in 2011 and relations in Myanmar were relatively peaceful until the military coup of 2021. Notably, Olivius and Hedström successfully apply the relational-peace framework to make sense of the discrepancies in the way the people they studied regarded war and peace. They note that differences between the Myanmar state and ethnic communities were not transformed. This exemplifies what is often the case: that peacemaking undertakings do not succeed. Contentious relations may persist without violence. The relational-peace framework provides measures of degrees of peacefulness, but lack explanatory power for the processes of change.

The sixth chapter, by Manuela Nilsson, examines military-civilian relations after many years of violence and the 2016 peace accord between the Columbian government and the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Columbia (FARC).[9] Much of the violence was related to the production of illegal drugs. Some disarmament was achieved but many violent acts persisted. Nilsson conducted 37 in-depth interviews of military and civilian actors in Bogota and rural Columbia in 2017 and found that the framework was applicable even in very challenging times. In applying the framework, Nilsson also found the third component of the relational-peace framework, the idea of the relationship, to be particularly important for understanding the discrepancies in military-civilian views of each other and of their relations.

Chapter 7, by Isabel Bramsen, is focused on the 2016–2020 Philippine peace talks between the Philippine government and the Communist Party of the Philippines.[10] She engaged in participatory observation of the third week-long session of negotiations in 2017, gained access to video material from the other negotiation sessions, and conducted interviews with the negotiators and others engaged in the process. She notes that peace negotiations often include the engagement of mediators and that was true in this case, but the focus here is on the dyad of the negotiators. She found that the negotiators shared many peaceful elements such

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[7] Jason Klocek, "The Shifting Sands of Relational Peace in Cyprus," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 102-126.

[8] Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström, "'They Treat Us Like Visitors in Our Own House': Relational Peace and Local Experiences of the State in Myanmar," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 127-149.

[9] Manuela Nillson, "Colombian Civilian and Military Actors' Perceptions of Their Relationship in the Era Following the 2016 Peace Accord," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds. *Relational Peace Practices*: 150-173.

[10] Isabel Bramsen, "The Web of Relations Shaping the Philippine Peace Talks," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices:* 174-197.

as deliberation and trust in each other. But the negotiations did not result in an accord. She notes that many other actors are important to reach a peace accord, beyond the dyad she studied. Interestingly, on 28 November 2023, the government announced peace negotiations were to be renewed.[11] But in 2024, military-rebel actions reoccurred.[12]

Chapter 8, by Nilanjana Premaratna, is focused on the Theater of the People, founded in 2002 in Sri Lanka with Tamil and Sinhalese members.[13] It is bilingual, called Jana Karalya in Sinhalese and Makkal Kalaria in Tamil, and wholly collaborative. The Sinhalese people constitute the majority of the population in Sri Lanka, followed by the Sri Lankan Tamils. They tended to live in different regions and with separate institutions before the civil war. Their conflict was particularly intense, focused between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The 26-year war ended in the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in May 2009. Premaratna bases her chapter on qualitative data she gathered from Jana Karalya after 2007. She interviewed members from the origin of Jana Karalya, tracing their relational changes over time. When individuals joined Jana Karalya they had no relationship with persons of a different ethnicity. To engage in performing together, they had to develop a tight, shared bilingual relationship, which took time. Premaratna finds that the elements of the relational-peace framework fit the process of greater peacefulness very well. Significantly, she also notes that the example of such inter-ethnic solidarity entities made it more feasible to envision a peacefully shared society.[14]

In the concluding chapter, the editors examine the implications of the very diverse empirical chapters for the framework of relational peace practices presented in the first chapter.[15] They understandably regard the findings of the research to confirm the utility of the framework to set out degrees of peacefulness. I agree and believe that the book is an important contribution to peace research. It should spur further research.

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[11] Jan M. Olsen, "Philippine Government and Communist Rebels Agree to Resume Talks on Ending their Protracted Conflict," *PBS News*, 28 November 2023, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/philippine-government-and-communist-rebels-agree-to-resume-talks-on-ending-their-protracted-conflict.

[12] "Report no. 338: Calming the Long War in the Philippine Countryside," *International Crisis Group*, 19 April 2024, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/338-calming-long-war-philippine-countryside.

[13] Nilanjana Premaratna, "Foes to Fellows to Friends: Performing Relational Peace through Theater in Sri Lanka," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 198-220. Interethnic and interreligious groups take different forms in many countries. They may be dialogue groups, or alliance and network groups. For example, see Louis Kriesberg, "Examples of Shared Israeli-Palestinian Actions," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 14 February 2024, https://fpif.org/examples-of-shared-israeli-palestinian-actions/.

[14] International cultural exchange programs can soften hostility between people in different societies. I think the US-Soviet exchanges, particularly between the intellectuals and cultural leaders of the two societies, contributed significantly to the transformation of Soviet elites and the end of the Cold War. Louis Kriesberg, *Realizing Peace: A Constructive Conflict Approach* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 32, 82-102; Yale Richmond, *U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958–1986: Who Wins?* (Westview, 1987).

[15] Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, "Relational Peace Practices Moving Forward."

The multitude of data utilized by the contributors in the book also should encourage other researchers, and the findings in the book should also be of interest and use to policy makers.

The research findings add attention to the processes accounting for movement between elements of more peacefulness. Some such processes might be added to the description of the framework. Additional attention to particular matters investigated in the conflict resolution literature might be helpful. This includes analyses of intractability, reconciliation, and mediation.[16] Focusing on dyads is central to the framework, but it imposes limitations. The framework, with its focus on dyadic relations is more appropriate to civil wars than international wars. Even within a single country, studying only two major adversaries who are seeking to advance peace may fail to attain a rounded understanding of the peace because other parties are absent. This is seen in the chapter about the Philippines. Multiple dyads might be necessary to make progress in increasing peacefulness and thus consideration of multiple dyads in the conflict is needed. Furthermore, third-party intermediaries of various kinds may be critical for the success of the peacemaking process.

Many people in many entities do not seek peace. They may want to dominate other people or even expel them. Some people may want to liberate themselves from domination and seek freedom or equality. Conflicts abound and many are worthy and result in a good peace. A term for conflicts that move adversaries toward equity and peacefulness is constructive conflicts.[17] In such conflicts, violence is minimized and efforts toward some mutual aims are made. It should be recognized that inducements in a conflict are not only coercion but also persuasion and possible benefits. As a consequence of these considerations, analysts of and participants in peacemaking should incorporate variations in the nature of the conflict whose peaceful transformation is being sought. This is implicit in the references to the importance of the "idea" of the conflict in some of the cases examined in *Relational Peace Practices*. Peace should not be characterized as stagnation. Social change can be peaceful and aided by constructive conflict. This can be the case in well-functioning democratic societies.

In conclusion, this book creatively fills a gap in peace-research literature and builds on a wide range of relevant literature. The book is commendable and valuable, even if it has important limitations. The

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[16] Conflict resolution research on transforming intractable conflicts may deliver relevant insights. See for example the website Beyond Intractability: https://www.beyondintractability.org; Miriam F. Elman, Catherine Gerard, Galia Golan, and Louis Kriesberg (ed.), *Overcoming Intractable Conflicts: New Approaches to Constructive Transformations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, eds., *Grasping the Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflicts* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2005). On reconciliation, see Yacov Bar-Siman-Tov, ed., *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, eds., *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

[17] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Porter Sargent, 1973); Bruce W. Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Emergence to Transformation*, 6th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2022); Louis Kriesberg, *Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

contributions it makes can be the basis for a more comprehensive approach to studying degrees of peacefulness.

Review by Terrence Lyons, George Mason University

Efforts to conceptualize peace have increased in recent years with an impressive "peace with adjectives" scholarship.[1] This scholarship often begins with a recognition of the important work on positive and negative peace but then seeks ways to move beyond the binary and develop ways to tease out the many varieties of conflict and peace and to generate an empirical research strategy. These have included everyday peace, illiberal peace, and agonistic peace, among many others.[2] Scholars have engaged in seeking new ways to define peace and there is a plethora of efforts to propose "peace with adjectives," leading some to flag the challenge that conceptual innovation could become conceptual fragmentation.[3] The introduction to *Relational Peace Practices* asks the core question plainly: "How do we grasp peace beyond the absence of war?"[4] (1). Anna K. Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, the volume's editors, argue that peace is a particular quality of a relationship, thereby avoiding defining peace too narrowly as negative peace or too broadly as positive peace. This scholarship is both exciting and indicates the vitality of the peace studies community. It also risks causing confusion and semantic debates that make knowledge accumulation more difficult.

Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, three Swedish peace scholars, have been thinking and writing on these challenges with collaborators over the years, in the Varieties of Peace Projects and several earlier publications.[5] They know the literature and have engaged in debates with the latest and most creative

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[1] Karin Aggestam, Fabio Cristiano, and Lisa Strömbom, "Towards Agonistic Peacebuilding? Exploring the Antagonism–Agonism Nexus in the Middle East Peace Process," *Third World Quarterly* 36:9 (2015): 1736-1753, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1044961; Pamina Firchow, *Reclaiming Everyday Peace: Local Voices in Measurement and Evaluation After War* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Madhav Joshi and Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Quality Peace: Peacebuilding after Civil War* (Routledge, 2018); Roger Mac Ginty, "Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace," *Security Dialogue* 41:4 (2010): 391-412, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010610376343.

[2] For a more comprehensive list and analysis see Simon Pierre Boulanger Martel, Anna Jarstad, Elisabeth Olivius, Johanna Söderström, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, and Malin Åkebo, "Peace with Adjectives: Conceptual Fragmentation or Conceptual Innovation?" *International Studies Review* 26:2 (2024), viae014, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viae014.

[3] For other reject efforts to conceptualize peace see Kristine Höglund and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "Beyond the Absence of War: The Diversity of Peace in Post-Settlement Societies," *Review of International Studies* 56:2 (2010): 367-390, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000069; Paul F. Diehl, "Exploring Peace: Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 60:1 (2016): 1-10, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqw005; Christian Davenport, Erik Melander, and Patrick M. Regan, *The Peace Continuum: What It Is and How to Study It* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Oliver P. Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty, Sandra Pogodda, Gëzim Visoka, "Power or Peace? Restoration or Emancipation through Peace Processes," *Peacebuilding* 9:3 (2021): 243-257, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2021.1911916.

[4] Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, "Introduction: Conceptualizing and Studying Relational Peace Practices," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices.* (Manchester University Press, 2023): 1-26, here 1.

[5] Varieties of Peace, https://www.varietiesofpeace.com.

thinking on this topic. Here they focus on the nature of relationships, building on the logic that there can be no peace and no conflict unless actors have some influence on each other. Relational peace also has the advantage that it captures the circumstances where both conflictual and peaceful characteristics co-exist, and that contradictory elements and hybrids are common.

Beyond the goal of furthering the conceptualization of peace, this volume aims to promote empirical research by specifying the processes that constitute relational peace. As seen in the case studies included in this collection, this allows scholars who look at a broad range of cases to ask similar questions and thereby facilitate comparisons and theory testing. Relational peace can be applied at the macro- and micro-levels and allows for methodological diversity.

The editors define relational peace as consisting of three components. The first, behavioral interaction, includes qualities such as deliberation, non-domination, and cooperation. The second, subjective attitudes, includes mutual recognition and trust. The third is how actors understand the relationship, ranging from "peace between friends" to "peace between fellows." The ideal type of relational peace, therefore, "entails behavioral interaction that can be characterized as deliberation, non-domination, and cooperation between actors in the dyad, the actors involved recognize and trust each other and believe that the relationship is either one between legitimate fellows or between friends" (11). Each element of relational peace may be present in differing degrees, a recognition of the concurrence of characteristics of peace and conflict, particularly in post-conflict settings.

Each component of the concept is carefully articulated, but, unsurprisingly for this kind of innovative work, questions remain. Non-domination is posited as a characterization of behavioral interaction. If we assume that in circumstances of power asymmetry, relationships are likely to be some combination of deliberation and cooperation, then it is unclear what non-domination adds to the concept of relational peace. If most conflicts emerge from circumstances of asymmetric power, then the characteristic of non-domination is hard to identify. The authors argue that institutions and legal systems may ensure non-domination, but institutions and law are embedded in power relations. In addition, the question of deliberation may include the kind of contestation and dissensus included in scholarship on agonistic peace agreements.[6] The behavioral component of relational peace may be quite contentious and include efforts to leverage power to dominate rivals.

Trust, an element of subjective attitudes, is presented here as a psychological mechanism. Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo write "studying trust means paying attention to the degree to which the two actors allow themselves to be vulnerable to the actions of the other without safeguards" (10). However, there is considerable research that suggests that trust may be built upon calculation.[7] Trust may reside in institutions rather than in the relationship with one's rival. Rather than an individual attribute, trust

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[6] Lisa Strömbom, Lisa, Isabel Bramsen, and Anne Lene Stein, "Agonistic Peace Agreements? Analytical Tools and Dilemmas," *Review of International Studies* 48:4 (2022): 689-704, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000055.

[7] See Russell Hardin, *Trust* (Polity: 2006).

building, as Herbert Kelman argues, is the central challenge to peace building. Confidence-building strategies have long been at the center of peacebuilding practice.[8] Credible commitments and overcoming information failures may generate trust without relying upon actor level attitudes. Institutional safeguards rather than accepting vulnerability may be a more promising way to generate trust.

Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo focus on binary relationships, although they also note the importance of recognizing peace as a web of multiple interactions across time, space, and levels. Indeed, Isabel Bramsen, who contributes a case study on the Philippine peace talks, emphasizes that the binary relations between the negotiators cannot explain the larger web of relations that includes intra-party dynamics, relations to civil society actors, and so on, and better explains the failure of the talks.[9] Conflicts such as civil wars often engage networks or "security assemblages" of actors and issues, which suggests that understanding peace may require conceptualizing how binary relationships form webs of relations.[10] Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo suggest that the relational approach allows for "a more nuanced understanding of peace beyond the absence of war by recognizing peace as a web of multiple interactions across time, space, and levels" (223) but how to conceptualize these larger networks remains unclear.[11] While the attention to understanding the fundamental importance of the relationship is one of this volume's strengths, questions regarding how to aggregate binary relationship require further work.

Finally, the editors emphasize dyadic relationships, but also recognize the challenges of identifying which relationships are most central to peace and acknowledge that actor boundaries are not always obvious or fixed. For a theory that is inherently actor-centered, questions around how to identify the most salient relationships make the concept harder to apply. In any protracted conflict there will be numerous relational dyads. While Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo provide significant guidance on how to research relationships, the question of which relationships matter most remains unclear.

This edited volume brings together a diverse set of case studies from different regions, different levels of analysis, and an impressive range of methodological approaches. The cases include Russia, Cyprus, Cambodia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, South Africa, and Colombia. Some draw on quantitative data from party manifestos and media accounts while others rely upon interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Most of the case study authors find more data on the behavioral characteristics of

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[8] Herbert C. Kelman, "Building Trust Among Enemies: The Central Challenge for International Conflict Resolution," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29:6 (2005): 639-650. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.011.

[9] Isabel Bramsen, "The Web of Relations Shaping the Philippine Peace Talks," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices:* 174-197.

[10] Fiona B. Adamson, "The Political Geography of Globalized Civil Wars: Networked Actors and Multi-Scalar Strategies in the Kurdish Conflict Assemblage," *International Studies Quarterly* 68:1 (2024), sqad060, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad060.

[11] Anna K. Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, "Relational Peace Practices Moving Forward," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 221-240.

relational peace, which is not surprising. Documents and interviews are likely to reveal actions more readily than underlying subjective attitudes or how to measure the idea of the relationship. Conceptually, the three components are logically connected, but empirically they are not equally open to observation and data collection. Each chapter explicitly applies the relational peace concept, providing a welcome coherence to this collection.

Many of the case studies clearly demonstrate the advantages of the relational peace concept in complicating the concept of peace. For example, the framework's ability to capture both the conflictual and peaceful nature of relationships allows Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström to see the ceasefire period in Myanmar as a "continuation of the war's many injustices, marked by discrimination, marginalization, and fear" (127).[12] Jason Klocek notes that the relational peace framework facilitates attention to the contentious dynamics within the Greek Cypriot community rather than the less flexible concept of negative peace.[13]

Some of the case study contributors problematize the issue of how to know which relationships matter most. In Cyprus, for example, Klocek argues that the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot bilateral relationship exhibits more relational peace than the relations within the Greek community. Manuela Nilson's excellent chapter on Colombian security sector reforms concludes that relational peace between state security actors and civilians is a more important component of post-accord reconciliation than relations between the opposing armed actors.[14] Bramsen on the Philippine peace negotiations points to the challenge of identifying the key actors, since those at the negotiating table may not be the parties that can sustain peace. She argues that "friendship at the negotiation table is insufficient for reaching peace and that other relations between the leaders, within-party relations, and the relations to civil society are critical for reaching a peace agreement, as well as for achieving peace in itself" (176). The challenge, therefore, remains how to identify the most salient relationships for the larger peace process.

This volume makes a significant contribution to the field of peace studies. It captures the ongoing debates clearly and advances a new concept of relational peace that is defined specifically so that it can guide empirical research. In addition, the cases studies demonstrate the diverse contexts where applying relational peace provides fresh insights across multiple levels of analysis. As noted above, there remain some questions about specific attributes and with regards to how bilateral relationships link up to larger networks. These questions indicate the important advance this book represents and the urge to develop the framework further.

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[12] Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström, "'They Treat Us Like Visitors in Our Own House': Relational Peace and Local Experiences of the State in Myanmar," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*.: 127-149.

[13] Jason Klocek, "The Shifting Sands of Relational Peace in Cyprus," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*,: 102-126.

[14] Manuela Nillson, "Colombian Civilian and Military Actors' Perceptions of Their Relationship in the Era Following the 2016 Peace Accord," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, eds. *Relational Peace Practices*: 150-173.

The advent of "peace with adjectives" has sparked debate within the world of peacebuilding scholarship. Some scholars welcome the rise of new ways to "grasp the empirical realities of peace" and reflect on critical normative foundations, while others argue that this trend contributes to fragmentation and prevents effective knowledge sharing between scholars of these different types of peace.[1] Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo's edited volume, *Relational Peace Practices*, makes a convincing case that at least some scholarship should continue to fall under the "peace with adjectives" umbrella. The book, which introduces a novel framework for peace scholarship and practice, showcases its potential utility through a wide variety of global case studies and methodological approaches. While a proliferation of peace approaches may lead to conceptual challenges for scholars, *Relational Peace Practices* makes a strong argument for the necessity of pursuing alternative visions of peace. These alternatives offer the potential for creating new insights rather than replicating knowledge gaps through the continued use of existing approaches.

The book's core contribution is its introduction of a relational peace framework, which comprises three core components. The first, behavioral interaction, consists of the existence of opportunities for deliberation, patterns of non-domination (which the authors describe as interactions in which "the room for action of the weaker actor in a dyad is not determined by the other" [8])[2], and instances of cooperation. The second component is subjective attitudes, which hinge on mutual recognition of the existence of the other in a dyad and trust between the actors. Finally, the relational peace framework includes a focus on ideas of the relationship. The authors distinguish between two different levels for this third component: fellowship, in which actors regard each other as legitimate others, and friendship, a more intimate relationship in which actors "know each other well and cherish one another" (11). This framework is an important contribution not merely because it is novel (and, given the critiques of the proliferation of peace approaches, perhaps even in spite of its novelty[3]), but because the authors position it in conversation with existing approaches to highlight the ways in which the relational framework provides unique insights that cannot be reached with other approaches. As the book aptly points out, existing frameworks often obscure

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[1] Simon Pierre Boulanger Martel, Anna Jarstad, Elisabeth Olivius, Johanna Söderström, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, and Malin Åkebo, "Peace with Adjectives: Conceptual Fragmentation or Conceptual Innovation?" *International Studies Review* 26:2 (2024): 1-23, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viae014.

[2] Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, "Introduction: Conceptualizing and Studying Relational Peace Practices," in Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices* (Manchester University Press, 2023): 1-26.

[3] See Bart Klem, "The Problem of Peace and the Meaning of 'Post-War'," *Conflict, Security & Development* 18:3 (2018): 233-255; for a similar critique of the development of "diminished subtypes" in speaking about democracy, see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49:3 (1997): 430-451.

the role of dyadic relationships, particularly those other than the relationships between conflict parties, in building and maintaining peace.

The relational peace framework is not, as the book recognizes, the only one to engage with relational considerations. The authors contrast the relational framework with agonistic approaches, which also focus on contestation and power relations between groups and individuals.[4] In differentiating between relational and agonistic peace, they note that "agonistic peace offers more room for domination and resistance to domination than what we would expect to see in a peace between fellows" (14). While this assessment is to some extent accurate, the agonistic "room" for domination comes not from an acceptance of the desirability of such dominance, but from distinct ontological foundations in which escape from domination is impossible without the eradication of identity itself.[5] The distinction between the two approaches is a welcome addition to the introduction of the book's framework, but it also somewhat obscures the critique that the relational peace framework underplays the element of the political (that is, the ineradicable antagonism that is part of human society).[6] The book also distinguishes its framework from other prominent peace frameworks, including the everyday peace framework. Chapter 5 in particular, which focuses on local experiences of peace in Myanmar, demonstrates how a relational analysis brings in additional features such as equality, recognition, and trust to augment standard everyday peace approaches which largely emphasize security and material needs (144-145).[7] The relational peace framework also offers more nuanced ways to discuss peace, thereby going beyond the conventional negative versus positive peace typology.[8]

One of the book's main claims is that the relational peace framework can be used in a wide range of methodological approaches, global contexts, and levels ranging from "macro-level relationships to interactions between individuals" (17). The eight empirical chapters cover cases including Cambodia, South Africa, and the Philippines, and focus on dyadic relationships between actors such as different elite groups, civilians and the military, and members of distinct ethnic groups within the same theater troupe. This breadth is an impressive illustration of the framework's versatility. Nevertheless, some applications of the framework seem more well-equipped to offer insights into relational dynamics than others. Nilanjana

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[4] For an overview of agonistic peace and transitional justice, see, for example, Lisa Strömbom, "Exploring Analytical Avenues for Agonistic Peace," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (2019): 1-23, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-019-00176-6; Emma Murphy and Dawn Walsh, "Agonistic Transitional Justice: A Global Survey," *Third World Quarterly* 43:6 (2022): 1380-1398, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1952068; Rosemary Shinko, "Agonistic Peace: A Postmodern Reading," *Millenium* 36:3 (2008): 473-491, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298080360030501.

[5] Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research* 66:3 (1999): 745-758.

[6] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (Verso, 2013).

[7] Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström, "'They Treat Us Like Visitors in Our Own House': Relational Peace and Local Experiences of the State in Myanmar," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, *Relational Peace Practices*: 127-149.

[8] Johan Galtung, "On the Meaning of Nonviolence," *Journal of Peace Research* 2:3 (1965): 228-256, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336500200303.

Premaratna's chapter on relational peace between Tamil and Sinhala members of Sri Lanka's Jana Karaliya (Theater of the People) group, for example, adopts a longitudinal approach to "map transitions in participatory arts-based peacebuilding" (199).[9] This careful tracing of relational dynamics over time through observation of and discussion with theater group members is clearly an appropriate window into the ways in which relational dynamics take shape and shift over time.

Other methods, however, pose greater challenges for achieving the insights relevant to characterizing the true relational dynamics. While newspaper articles covering interactions between actors may offer insights into discourses around these dynamics, the analysis at times dips into acceptance of media-oriented statements at face value when describing, for example, the ideas of the relationship. Jason Klocek's chapter on relational peace in Cyprus highlights the importance of going beyond initial analysis of relationships, noting that while it "may be tempting to see [formal peace talks between Greek and Turkish elites] as a form of fellowship, [...] a deeper look at negotiations offers a more cautionary tale" (119).[10] The intricacies and layers of relational dynamics at play suggest that it may be difficult to truly apply a relational peace framework using methods that integrate only one form of data, particularly when this data centers more on public appearances and statements. The relational analysis might be augmented through additional engagement with reflexivity and triangulation; while the researcher(s) may not be part of the dyad under consideration, reflections on the "ontological and epistemological assumptions built into particular methods of data analysis"[11] in specific chapters and methodologies would add to the book's overarching interrogation of these assumptions in the framework itself. In addition, the integration of multiple data sources would contribute to the richness of the analysis of dyadic relations that can, at times, center firmly on a single perspective of the characterization of relational dynamics.

Another area for further consideration in light of the range of cases and methodological approaches within the book centers on the role that the relational peace elements described in the introduction play in conducting relational peace analysis. The authors note in the conclusion that one of the book's main contributions is to "move beyond the relational peace as an ideal, and scrutinize what this looks like in real dyadic relations [as a way of providing] insights into how *relational peace practices* manifest themselves" (225).[12] At times, however, the chapters seem to slip into treating the framework as an ideal against which to measure. This tendency is particularly pronounced in discussions of non-domination, an element of the behavioral interaction component; the authors note in the introduction that "the existence of domination is easier than its absence (non-domination) to ascertain empirically" (8), and indeed the empirical chapters

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[9] Nilanjana Premaratna, "Foes to Fellows to Friends: Performing Relational Peace through Theater in Sri Lanka," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, *Relational Peace Practices*: 198-220.

[10] Jason Klocek, "The Shifting Sands of Relational Peace in Cyprus," in Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, *Relational Peace Practices*: 102-126.

[11] Natasha S. Mauthner and Andrea Doucet, "Reflexive Accounts and Accounts of Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis," *Sociology* 37:3 (2003): 413-431, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385030373002.

[12] Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström, and Malin Åkebo, "Relational Peace Practices Moving Forward," in: Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, *Relational Peace Practices*: 221-240.

seem to struggle to find definitive examples of non-domination. This trend sparks ontological questions about the true possibility of non-domination, particularly when alternative approaches (such as the agonistic ones discussed above) argue that domination can never be completely eradicated.[13] The lack of clear-cut examples of non-domination in the empirical chapters raise questions about the necessary and sufficient conditions needed to provide a classification of a relationship as free from domination.

One additional point for further engagement relates to the question of dyads themselves. While the empirical chapters recognize the importance of other dyadic relationships outside of the ones they hone in on specifically, the singular dyadic focus raises questions about the potential of relational approaches to capture intersectional identities and dynamics. The focus on dyads suggests the possibility of isolating certain identity dynamics from the holistic subject-position of individuals, which can contribute to assumptions that "social groups are marginalized homogeneously and singularly" and can gloss over the challenges faced by those who are intersectionally marginalized.[14] Many of the authors explicitly recognize the existence of these intragroup differences and patterns of domination that a dyadic analysis of other relationships does not capture, but it is not clear how a relational peace framework could incorporate these intersectional dynamics beyond acknowledgement of their existence.

While the book introduces the novel relational peace framework, it also does not shy away from including critical engagement with the approach. Isabel Bramsen's chapter on relational dynamics during the 2016–2020 Philippine peace talks includes a critique of the "idea of the relationship" component of the relational framework. Bramsen persuasively argues that this idea "does not characterize the relationship per se," but instead serves as an *effect* of the non-peaceful nature of the relationship; rather than *cognitive* ideas constituting the relationship, in other words, Bramsen asserts that "*relational* aspects such as interactions and social bonds between the parties" serve this function (177).[15] To live up to its relational name, this critique suggests, relational peace needs to focus less on individual perceptions of the relationship and more on the relationship itself. This critical engagement opens crucial space for developing and debating the arguments at the core of *Relational Peace Practices*. Further critical engagement with the relational peace ideas in future scholarship could continue to develop a clearer picture of the potential gaps in the applicability of the framework and contribute to developing the nuances of the book's arguments.

Relational Peace Practices opens up crucial new avenues for peace research. It starts from a place of recognition that "research thus far has not managed to fully understand what constitutes peace nor to explain the different varieties of peace that evolve after war" (221). While the relational peace framework outlined in the book does not provide a simple or one-size-fits-all answer to these dilemmas, it does

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[13] See fn 4.

[14] Ashlee Christoffersen, "The Politics of Intersectional Practice: Competing Concepts of Intersectionality," *Policy & Politics* 49:4 (2021): 573-593., DOI: https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16194316141034. See also Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Duke University Press, 2019).

[15] Isabel Bramsen, "The Web of Relations Shaping the Philippine Peace Talks," in: Jarstad, Söderström, and Åkebo, *Relational Peace Practices*: 174-197.

delineate a versatile and rigorous approach to analyze relationships across territories and over time. The book also offers pathways for more nuanced discussions about peace, particularly when "peace" seems imperfect or partial. As the authors note, it is possible, by focusing on dyadic relationships, to recognize peace between some actors while not downplaying the existence of ongoing violence between others (222). It is unlikely that one single framework will ever be able to address the full range of research questions falling under the umbrella of peace studies, but *Relational Peace Practices* makes a strong case for the argument that novel approaches are still needed to capture and address the dynamics at play in societies that have experienced violence. It convincingly shows, furthermore, that the relational peace framework both offers insights into the obstacles standing in the way of true peace and suggests routes to working towards this peace. The book's thorough theoretical development and depth of empirical engagement will make it an invaluable resource for scholars and practitioners alike.

Reply by Malin Åkebo, Umeå University; Anna Jarstad, Uppsala University; and Johanna Söderström, Uppsala University

It is an honor to have our book reviewed by such distinguished scholars as Louis Kriesberg, Terrence Lyons, and Emma Murphy. When we started working on the concept of *relational peace*[1] our goal was to contribute to, and further advance, important ongoing scholarly conversations about peace beyond the absence of war. Our heartfelt thanks go to Birgit Schneider for creating an opportunity for such a conversation. We are grateful for the overall appraisal and for the opportunity to elaborate on the sharp and succinct comments provided in the reviews. We feel honored to read the depictions of our book, which stress its usefulness for current peace research and characterize our work as ambitious, innovative, and nuanced. We want to thank all three reviewers for generously engaging with our work. We also especially want to thank Paul Diehl, who has been very influential in our work,[2] for writing the introduction. While our edited book allowed us to engage with some of the critical questions raised by the reviewers, we recognize the need for more advanced and elaborate reasoning to address them further. We look forward to continuing this exploration in future scholarship, in dialogue with our reviewers, and with other scholars. We hope this response can also contribute meaningfully to that ongoing conversation.

To begin with, the road to peace is not straightforward. As Kriesberg notes in his review, "Many people in many entities do not seek peace," and even when actors seek peace there are multiple understandings of what peace entails. We are not alone in trying to make sense of how to understand how societies move toward peace, and indeed to what extent we see peace in various circumstances. As highlighted in another publication, there has been a mushrooming of "peace with adjectives."[3] We share Lyons's concern that this trend risks "causing confusion and semantic debates that make knowledge accumulation more difficult." For this reason, we follow the advice by Boulanger Martel et al., who emphasize the importance of clarifying the purpose of a new concept. In the case of relational peace, this is a question of conceptual narrowing. Relational peace is one of many fruitful approaches to understanding and describing peace. The aim of our descriptive framework is to help researchers empirically investigate peace. We narrow down on a peace definition through focusing on a set of key relational attributes. While we have not explicitly included the concepts of the "political" and of "power" in the framework, as noted by Murphy, we affirm that peace

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[1] Johanna Söderström, Malin Åkebo, and Anna Jarstad, "Friends, Fellows, and Foes: A New Framework for Studying Relational Peace," *International Studies Review* 23:3 (2021): 484-508.

[2] Not least through many of his publications, e.g., Paul F. Diehl, "Exploring Peace: Looking Beyond War and Negative Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 60:1 (2016): 1-10; Paul F. Diehl, "Peace: A Conceptual Survey," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies in Comparative International Development* 26 (April 2019), https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-515; Paul F. Diehl, "Charting the Norms–Peace Relationship: Looking Back to Look Ahead," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (October 2024): 540-557, https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2024.2407192.

[3] Simon Pierre Boulanger Martel, Anna Jarstad, Elisabeth Olivius, Johanna Söderström, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, and Malin Åkebo, "Peace with Adjectives: Conceptual Fragmentation or Conceptual Innovation?" *International Studies Review* 26:2 (2024): 1-23.

practices often in themselves are political, or carry political implications. Indeed, whether or not the actors in focus are explicitly politically active, all the components of the framework engage with political questions. We also believe that it is important to recognize that what may initially appear to be non-political acts, such as various everyday practices, often aggregate and connect to explicitly political issues. We envision our framework as being applicable across several different strands of research, including political science, peace research, international relations, foreign policy analysis, civil war studies, sociology, and development studies, to name a few.

We were happy to see that the reviewers overall found the elements in the relational peace framework productive. The framework is based on key components and elements that make up a peaceful relationship: behavioral interactions (non-domination, deliberation and cooperation); attitudes towards each other (recognition and trust); and ideas about the relationship (fellowship or friendship). The focus of our analysis of relational peace is on the dynamic processes of how actors interact and associate by paying attention to these components, and their respective elements, and changes therein.

All three reviewers raise questions about the element of non-domination and discussed power imbalances in connection with domination. As pointed out by Murphy, non-domination seems hard to identify in the empirical chapters of the book. However, in line with Kriesberg, we suggest that non-domination is a key element for analyzing relational peace practices because it essentially concerns issues of power and power-dynamics. Conflicts often involve power asymmetries, as Lyons rightfully notes. Here, we want to emphasize that non-domination does not imply the eradication of power asymmetries as such but concerns the transformation of power-relations. In response to Lyons' comment, we think that it is important to treat non-domination as a separate phenomenon, as it pinpoints that we need to look beyond cooperation and deliberation, and to understand under what conditions such behavior is carried out.

The relational peace concept is an ideal type, which is meant to assist in assessing if there is more or less non-domination within a relationship. Paying attention to degrees of domination points us to power dynamics, as is shown in Johanna Söderström's chapter (51-73).[4] Teasing out the nuances between domination and non-domination as relationships evolve over time, or how domination attempts are avoided, or how institutional safeguards are put in place to undo domination, is thus important, even within the confines of asymmetric power. While we do not necessarily expect a complete absence of domination, examining how domination and non-domination practices are enacted allows us to uncover subtle nuances and shifts which are essential to understanding how relations unfold. The lack of clear-cut examples of non-domination in the empirical chapters in the book is therefore not a surprise.[5]

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[4] Johanna Söderström. "Relational Peace among Elites in Cambodia? Domination, Distrust and Dependency," in Anna Jarstad, Johanna Söderström and Malin Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices* (Manchester University Press, 2023): 51-73.

[5] However, for examples of non-domination, see e.g., Anna Jarstad, "Another Cyprus: Exploring Relationships in Karpasia/Karpaz," conference paper for CRS, University of Kent, 17-19 September 2025.

In contrast to earlier work building on positive peace, which often focus more on structure, our approach stresses the importance of studying agency. This also means that we stress the processual and the dynamic. This agency focus is not without its challenges, however (230).[6] Indeed, an important point brought forward by all the reviewers has to do with how to identify actors, select actors to research, as well as how to conceptualize and think about the larger system of relations that is implied when researching relational peace. We think about actors in a similar way as Anastasia Shesterinina, who employs "a nonlinear view of civil war, where it is not predefined actors engaging in interactions that set off predictable sequences of events but multidirectional and changing relations that can turn the process in unexpected ways."[7]

Determining which actors are relevant to study or understand in a specific context or sequence of events requires careful research. Relationships are reconfigured in multiple ways over time, and the relational peace framework enables researchers to examine specifically how relationships are reconfigured. Thus, any analysis that applies relational peace over time should consider problems of boundary specification around actors, including the extent to which an "actor" remains cohesive or becomes fragmented over time (e.g., 16, 229). While using dyads helps to make the analytical work more manageable, this analytical device should not prevent researchers from questioning and indeed scrutinizing the applicability of the concept of a dyad, or indeed stepping outside and beyond it. The relative weight assigned to studying specific actor dyads or the processes of the unfolding relations themselves should be motivated by the researcher who employs the framework. In our view, the framework can be used rigidly to describe one specific dyad, and can also be employed to disentangle the dynamics in several relations, but it can also focus on revealing how different behavior components interact and influence one another and how such interactions shape how relations and actors themselves are reconfigured over time.[8]

Kriesberg suggests that one limitation with the focus on dyads is that the framework "is more appropriate to civil wars than international wars." While we have not yet seen much work at this level using the relational peace framework (beyond the chapter by Niklas Eklund, Malin Eklund Wimelius, and Jörgen Elfving, 27-

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[6] See also Söderström, Åkebo, and Jarstad, "Friends, Fellows, and Foes," 488-489.

[7] Anastasia Shesterinina, "Civil War as a Social Process: Actors and Dynamics from Pre- to Post-War," *European Journal of International Relations* 28:3 (2022): 539-540.

[8] However, for discussions on variations in relational approaches see Morgan Brigg, "Furthering Relational Approaches to Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 62:4 (2025): 1046-1060; and Heidi Hudson, "More than Connecting the Gender Dots: Exploring a Deep Relations Approach in Environmental Peacebuilding," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 0:0 (2025): 1-18. For examples of similar discussions around relationality in civil war studies, see also Kate Lonergan, "Everyday Reconciliation: Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Relational Repair in the Aftermath of Violence," *Global Studies Quarterly* 5(3) (2025): 1-13; Hanna Ketola, "Familial Ties as a Gendered Relationality in Civil War: Militarisation, Violence and Politics," *Civil Wars* 27:1 (2025): 116-138; and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, Deprez Miriam, Kent Lia, Babatunde Obamamoye, Dahlia Simangan, and Joanne Wallis, "Time for Peace?," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 79:1 (2025): 46-54.

50,[9] on Russia's relations with Georgia and Moldova),[10] we would be very excited to see work at the international level, for instance studies of the dyadic relations between NATO states, of relations between American and Russian presidents, or of an entire network of actors around specific decisions at the UN security council. We also want to stress that a lot of the work that inspired our framework came from the field of International Relations.[11]

Lyons wonders about how to identify "which relationships are most central to peace." We agree that this is indeed a challenge, and it requires that scholars using the framework know the context well. We have refrained from developing set criteria for the selection of relevant dyads (even if we offer some advice in the book: see 4-5, 16, 230), because we believe that it is difficult to formulate general rules applicable to all contexts and levels of analysis. But this also points us to the importance of considering the overall network of dyads (238), and we agree with Lyons that it is challenging to conceptualize, as well as to study, such networks.

While none of the contributors conducts a network analysis in the book,[12] the framework is applied at different levels, from the IR level (Eklund et al., 27-50)[13] all the way down to more micro-sociological settings (Nilanjana Premaratna, 198-220,[14] and Isabel Bramsen, 174-197[15]). In addition, several chapters in the book illustrate how intra-actor dynamics can influence inter-actor peace (for example Bramsen, 174-197)[16],

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[9] Niklas Eklund, Malin Eklund Wimelius, and Jörgen Elfving, "Russian Ideas of Peace and Peacekeeping," in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 27-50.

[10] The following recent work within IR and foreign policy has also been inspired by relational peace: Lydia König Svalander, "Real Partners or Just Neighbors the EU Is Afraid of? Researching North African Political Leadership and Their Rhetoric When Talking about the European Union" (Master's thesis, Uppsala University, 2025), https://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1937832&dswid=2112. Andreas Nishikawa-Pacher, "Diplomacy's Paradox in the Law of State Awards," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 16:1 (2021): 175-185; Simon Koschut, "When International Rituals Go Wrong: How Ritual Failure Undermines Peaceful Change in NATO," *Cooperation and Conflict* 59:2 (2024): 290-307; Lisa Hoffmann, Julia Köbrich, Eric Stollenwerk, and Matthias Basedau, "Correlates of Peace: Religious Determinants of Interreligious Peace," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (2024): 1-24.

[11] See for example Andrea Oelsner, "Friendship, Mutual Trust and the Evolution of Regional Peace in the International System," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 10:2 (2007): 257-279; Astrid H. M. Nordin, and Graham M. Smith, "Reintroducing Friendship to International Relations: Relational Ontologies from China to the West," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18:3 (2018): 369-396; Gary Goertz, Paul F. Diehl, and Alexandru Balas, *The Puzzle of Peace: The Evolution of Peace in the International System* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[12] See however Evelyne Tauchnitz, "'Doing Peace': Conceptualizing Relational Peace through Interactions and Networks in a Digitalized World," *Data & Policy* 7 (2025): 1-21, for a discussion on a network approach.

[13] Eklund, Wimelius, and Elfving, "Russian Ideas of Peace and Peacekeeping."

[14] Nilanjana Premaratna, "Foes to Fellows to Friends: Performing Relational Peace through Theater in Sri Lanka" in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 198-220.

[15] Isabel Bramsen, "The Web of Relations Shaping the Philippine Peace Talks" in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 174-197.

[16] Bramsen, "The Web of Relations Shaping the Philippine Peace Talks."

and how multiple dyads relate (for example Jason Klocek, 102-126),[17] highlighting the importance of examining interactions within and across different levels of analysis. Again, here we see the framework, and the empirical chapters, as a stepping stone in this endeavor, and this is also where we hope to go in the near future: offering a description of webs of multiple relations. In *Relational Peace Practices*, we suggest that the experience of empirical work of this type can help inform further theory building relevant for how to conceptualize networks and relational peace.

Murphy also notes interesting future areas for research, particularly pertaining to intersectional dynamics, and intragroup dynamics.[18] Using the framework as a starting point, and digging deeper into specific actors and interrogating their cohesion, or their "actorness" through how consistent their interactions are within specific dyads, and within specific networks, offers very exciting avenues for future work. Similarly, future work should differentiate and carefully consider the extent to which the data used in a particular study mainly speaks to perceptions of the relationship, whether from within or outside the relationship, or whether the data directly captures the relationship itself. For instance, in the chapter on Colombia (150-173),[19] we see how Manuela Nilsson contrasts the views of actors in the same dyadic relationship with one another, and where differences across these constituent actors point us to issues of future concern. Overall, in the book, we see several examples of the aforementioned approaches, but how this is approached depends on the larger research contribution each study tries to make. Clearly, this is an area where much more work can be done.

Continuing with a discussion of methods, Murphy raises questions about whether it is really possible to do justice to the relational peace framework with just one type of data. The point of the book is to show a diversity of ways in which the framework can be approached with different forms of data, scope, and focus (222). Hence, we do not have a strict preference for what kind of data should be used in each specific project. What we hope to show in the book is how the framework can be approached with various forms of data, and with data that to varying degrees enable triangulation. The more we move toward analyzing a system of actors, or entire networks, however, the more the need for varied data increases. We also recognize that in some cases triangulation is more important than in others. Similarly, depending on the state of the current research, it may be more important to add depth to one perspective over another if more attention has already been devoted to one actor. And there may also be situational limitations on how much material can be collated, and even on what types of material are available. For instance, Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström encountered challenges in obtaining data on all actors within the dyads they aimed to

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[17] Jason Klocek, "The Shifting Sands of Relational Peace in Cyprus" in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 102-126.

[18] See also Malin Åkebo and Tanuja Thurairajah, "Micro-Level Experiences, Understandings and Visions of Peace in Sri Lanka's War Victory," *Peacebuilding* 12:3 (2023): 410-428.

[19] Manuela Nilsson, "Colombian Civilian and Military Actors' Perceptions of their Relationship in the Era Following the 2016 Peace Accord," in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 150-173.

study, partly due to ongoing violence in some of the areas where data collection was taking place (127-149).[20] Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Anna Jarstad was unable to carry out field work as planned and therefore turned to online materials and digital interviews to supplement earlier field work (74-101).[21] We hope that the book will inspire others to see the myriad of ways in which the framework can be empirically approached.

Finally, we want to address the question of causality. We agree with Kriesberg that our framework lacks explanatory power for the processes of change. This is by design: our framework is intended for nuanced analytical, empirical studies of peace, and is therefore descriptive rather than explanatory or prescriptive. The book therefore set out to focus on description, and our approach enables the study of a complex web of interactions, where some actors behave peacefully while others do not. But we agree that questions around change and causation are pivotal next steps (228, 237-239). As we note in the concluding chapter of the book, the framework facilitates comparisons across cases and over time, and can thus contribute to theorization around causes of peace. Pinpointing shifts in specific dyads in specific cases by using the descriptive framework invites us to examine more closely why such changes occurred. Using the example of trust, we want to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between what relational peace is and how it can be achieved. We agree with Lyons that building institutional safeguards to overcome mistrust is a promising strategy, but these institutional safeguards are not the same as trust.

Similarly, peace and peacebuilding interventions are two separate phenomena. Thus, the path to trust may indeed involve confidence-building strategies, which can also be easier to detect in empirical studies, especially when interview data is missing, but trust may equally originate from other experiences, for example through repeated experiences of non-domination and recognition. Thus, a causal path forward here might include digging deeper into why trust shifted; was it because of institutional safeguards, and if so, what enabled them to be built? Have trust levels changed in the same way for both actors in the dyad? Causal questions in relation to the framework could also disentangle how different dyads influence one another, across levels and arenas. We look forward to more work that explores the larger question: What causes relational peace? Addressing this question requires us to explore issues such as when and how do shifts toward more peaceful relationships occur? Why do changes within relations occur? Do explanations at different levels differ? And what are the effects of relational peace on other phenomena?

Again, we want to thank Paul Diehl for writing the introduction, and the reviewers for generously engaging with our work and with the work of the chapter authors, and Birgit Schneider for commissioning this roundtable. We hope this roundtable and future dialogues will contribute meaningfully to understanding peace as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon in itself. As contemporary peace research continues to evolve, we look forward to participating in ongoing conversations about how peace emerges, takes hold,

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[20] Elisabeth Olivius and Jenny Hedström, "'They Treat us Like Visitors in our Own House': Relational Peace and Local Experiences of the State in Myanmar," in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace*: 127-149.
[21] Anna Jarstad, "At the End of the Rainbow: Intergroup Relations in South Africa," in Jarstad, Söderström and Åkebo, eds., *Relational Peace Practices*: 74-101.

and endures in the real world. In these turbulent times, empirical studies of peace and deeper theoretical reflections on its causes and consequences are more crucial than ever.