Mudasser Awan, Shamana Munawar, Iffat Khalid, Shafia Jamil

Whose Culture, Whose Peace?

Power, Representation, and Identity in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution

Time Bridge. Peace and Cross-Cultural Dialoge, hg. v. Mühlbauer, Stoev und Swoboda, 2026, S. 102–120
https://10.25364/978-3-903374-67-6_8

© 2026 bei Mudasser Awan, Shamana Munawar, Iffat Khalid, Shafia Jamil
Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Namensnennung 4.0 International Lizenz, ausgenommen von dieser Lizenz sind Abbildungen, Screenshots und Logos.

Mudasser Awan, COMSATS University in Lahore, mhussain@cuilahore.edu.pk
Shamana Munawar, COMSATS University in Lahore, sabamunawar48@gmail.com
Iffat Khalid, COMSATS University in Lahore, iffatkhalid@cuilahore.edu.pk, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4839-3910
Shafia Jamil, Department of Humanities at COMSATS University in Lahore, shafia.jamil@comsats.edu.pk

Zusammenfassung

Das Kapitel untersucht kritisch die kulturellen und machtpolitischen Annahmen dominanter Ansätze der Konfliktlösung und fragt: „Wessen Frieden?“ und „Wessen Kultur?“. Es argumentiert, dass westlich-liberale Konzepte von Frieden, Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung häufig als universell gelten und dadurch lokale sowie indigene Vorstellungen marginalisieren können. Die Übertragung externer Modelle kann bestehende Machtasymmetrien reproduzieren und die Legitimität und Nachhaltigkeit von Friedensprozessen schwächen. Aufbauend auf postkolonialer Friedensforschung, local ownership und indigenen Gerechtigkeitsmechanismen entwickelt das Kapitel einen kontextsensiblen Bezugsrahmen. Vier vergleichende Fallstudien zeigen, wie inklusive und lokal verankerte Ansätze zu nachhaltigerem Frieden beitragen können.

Schlagwörter: Konflikt Resolution, Postkoloniale Friedensförderung, Lokale Mitsprache

Abstract

This chapter critically examines the cultural and power-related assumptions underlying dominant approaches to conflict resolution and asks: “Whose peace?” and “Whose culture?” It argues that Western-liberal concepts of peace, justice, and reconciliation are often presented as universal, thereby marginalizing local and Indigenous understandings. The transfer of externally developed models can reproduce existing power asymmetries and undermine the legitimacy and sustainability of peace processes. Drawing on postcolonial peace research, local ownership, and Indigenous justice mechanisms, the chapter develops a context-sensitive analytical framework. Four comparative case studies demonstrate how inclusive and locally grounded approaches can contribute to more sustainable peace.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Postcolonial Peacebuilding, Local Ownership, Indigenous Justice

Introduction

This chapter critically examines the cultural assumptions embedded within dominant approaches to conflict resolution, asking whose understanding of peace, justice, and reconciliation is privileged when external actors intervene in culturally distinct conflict settings. While conflict resolution as a field presents itself as a neutral, technical practice applicable across contexts, this chapter argues that its conceptual vocabulary drawn largely from liberal, Western political traditions frequently marginalizes local understandings of harm, accountability, and restoration. Drawing on postcolonial and critical peace studies perspectives, the chapter contends that the imposition of externally derived frameworks onto culturally different societies can reproduce the very power asymmetries that conflict resolution claims to address. The chapter is guided by two research questions: first, how do dominant conflict resolution frameworks represent and incorporate or fail to incorporate non-Western cultural understandings of peace and justice; and second, what are the consequences of this representational imbalance for the legitimacy and durability of peace outcomes in culturally diverse societies. Adopting a qualitative, document-based comparative case study design across four cases, the chapter synthesizes literature on postcolonial critique, local ownership, and indigenous justice mechanisms to build an integrated analytical framework. It concludes that durable cross-cultural peacebuilding requires a fundamental rebalancing of whose cultural knowledge counts, and offers suggestions for future.

Cross-cultural conflict resolution has increasingly evolved beyond conventional diplomatic approaches to embrace participatory, context-sensitive, and locally grounded peacebuilding strategies. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that sustainable peace depends not only on dialogue but also on the equitable representation of diverse communities and the recognition of unequal power relations that shape conflict and reconciliation processes. Questions of identity are central to this framework, as religious, ethnic, and cultural identities influence both the causes of conflict and the prospects for peaceful coexistence. From a postcolonial peacebuilding perspective, externally imposed models of conflict resolution are often criticized for overlooking local histories, cultural traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. Consequently, greater emphasis is placed on local ownership, whereby communities actively participate in designing and implementing peace initiatives that reflect their own social and cultural realities. This approach also acknowledges the value of indigenous justice mechanisms, which frequently incorporate restorative practices, communal reconciliation, and culturally embedded forms of dispute resolution. Methodologically, scholars

increasingly employ qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to examine how different combinations of social, political, and institutional factors contribute to successful peacebuilding outcomes across diverse contexts. Collectively, these perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how cross-cultural conflict resolution can foster inclusive, contextually relevant, and sustainable peace.

Conflict resolution as an academic field and a professional practice has long presented itself as a universally applicable toolkit, offering models of mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation that can, in principle, be transplanted from one cultural context to another (Lederach, 1995). Yet a growing body of scholarship has questioned this claim to universality, arguing that the concepts at the heart of mainstream conflict resolution individual rights, formal negotiation, legal accountability, and reconciliation through truth-telling are themselves products of a particular cultural and historical trajectory rooted in Western liberal thought (Brigg & Bleiker, 2011). When these frameworks are applied in societies with different cosmological, religious, or communal understandings of harm and restoration, the result is not a neutral transfer of technical expertise but an encounter between unequal cultural systems, in which one system is treated as the standard against which the other is measured. This observation establishes the central concern of this chapter: the politics of representation embedded within cross-cultural conflict resolution itself.

Building on this concern, the chapter proceeds from the premise that questions of 'whose peace' and 'whose culture' are not peripheral to conflict resolution but are constitutive of it: every peace process embodies assumptions about what counts as a legitimate grievance, an acceptable remedy, and a credible peacemaker, and these assumptions are never culturally neutral (Richmond, 2011). The chapter therefore situates the analysis within a broader pattern of representational asymmetry, in which externally designed frameworks are presented as universal while local frameworks are treated as particular, traditional, or in need of reform. The remainder of the chapter is organised into seven further sections: a clarification of key terms; the problem statement; the research questions, objectives, and scope; the methodology; the literature review and four-case comparison; the conclusion, divided into implications for research and for practice; and a closing note on positionality. The next section defines the key concepts used throughout the chapter.

Key Terms

Three terms recur throughout this chapter and are defined here to ensure conceptual clarity. First, a cultural framework of justice and reconciliation refers to a coherent set of beliefs, procedures, and symbols through which a community understands harm, assigns responsibility, and restores relationships; this may be codified in formal law or embedded in custom, ritual, and oral tradition (Lederach, 1995). Second, representation refers to the way in which a cultural framework is described, categorised, and positioned within a peace process — whether it is presented as a universal standard, a local variant, a supplementary addition, or an obstacle to be managed (Sabaratnam, 2013). Third, local ownership refers to the degree of authority that local and indigenous actors hold over the design, implementation, and evaluation of a peace process, as distinct from mere participation or consultation within a process whose core structure remains externally determined (Donais, 2012). A final clarification concerns the relationship between 'indigenous' and 'local': this chapter uses 'indigenous' in the more specific sense recognised in international and constitutional law, denoting peoples with a distinct claim to self-governance predating the modern state, as in the Colombian case, whereas 'local' is used more broadly for community-based practices that may or may not carry this formal status, as with Rwanda's gacaca tradition. These three concepts, together with this terminological distinction, form the analytical vocabulary used to compare the cases examined later in the chapter, and the next section uses them to specify the problem this chapter addresses.

Problem Statement and Methodological Approach

Despite decades of critique from postcolonial and critical peace studies scholars, mainstream conflict resolution practice continues to rely on frameworks — liberal peacebuilding, transitional justice modelled on truth commissions, and formal mediation procedures — that originated in specific Western institutional contexts and are then exported to culturally diverse settings (Mac Ginty, 2011). Local mechanisms for managing conflict, such as customary courts, communal reconciliation rituals, or religiously grounded forgiveness practices, are frequently incorporated only in a subordinate or supplementary capacity, framed as 'traditional' additions to a fundamentally externally designed process rather than as alternative frameworks in their own right (Shaw & Waldorf, 2010). The result is an analytical and practical gap: the conflict resolution literature has extensively documented the existence of local justice mechanisms, but has been less successful at explaining how the relative status accorded to different cultural frameworks — which is treated as universal and which as particular — affects the legitimacy and

durability of the resulting peace. This chapter addresses that gap by treating representational hierarchy itself as a variable that shapes peace outcomes, asking how the relative positioning of cultural frameworks within a peace process affects its acceptance by the population it is meant to serve. Having identified this gap, the chapter now specifies the research questions, objectives, and scope that follow directly from it.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do dominant conflict resolution frameworks represent — and incorporate or fail to incorporate — non-Western cultural understandings of peace, justice, and reconciliation?

RQ2: What are the consequences of this representational imbalance for the legitimacy and durability of peace outcomes in culturally diverse and post-colonial societies?

Research Objectives:

RO1: To critically examine how mainstream conflict resolution frameworks position local and indigenous cultural understandings of justice and reconciliation relative to externally derived models.

RO2: To compare cases of cross-cultural peacebuilding in order to identify recurring patterns of representational asymmetry and their effects on local legitimacy.

Scope and Delimitations: This chapter is delimited to the analysis of representational hierarchies between externally derived and local or indigenous frameworks of justice and reconciliation, as documented in secondary scholarly and institutional sources. It does not address the gendered dimensions of representation in peace processes, which constitute a substantial and related literature in their own right, nor does it provide primary empirical data collected through fieldwork. The chapter is also delimited to four illustrative cases Rwanda, Timor-Leste, Northern Ireland, and Colombia selected for their documentary richness and geographic diversity, rather than a representative sample of all cross-cultural peace processes. With these boundaries established, the next section explains how the four cases will be analyzed methodologically.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative research design, employing a comparative case study approach to examine how cultural frameworks are represented and ranked within cross-cultural conflict resolution processes (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research questions concern meaning, representation, and legitimacy — dimensions that are interpretive in nature and not amenable to quantification, requiring instead close reading of how cultural frameworks are described, positioned, and evaluated within texts (Bryman, 2016). Three criteria informed the purposive selection of the four illustrative cases. First, each case involves a peacebuilding or transitional justice process in which an externally derived framework was introduced alongside pre-existing local or indigenous mechanisms. Second, each case has generated sufficient documentary and scholarly record to permit analysis of how the two frameworks were represented relative to one another. Third, the four cases span distinct cultural and geographic contexts — Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and Latin America — allowing the chapter to assess whether patterns of representational asymmetry recur across markedly different settings (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This rationale for case selection leads directly into the data sources and analytic procedure described next.

Data for this chapter are drawn entirely from secondary qualitative sources, including peer-reviewed academic literature, reports from international organizations and non-governmental bodies involved in peacebuilding, and documentary records of transitional justice and reconciliation processes. These sources were analyzed using qualitative document analysis, a method that involves the systematic interpretation of textual material to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships across the dataset (Bowen, 2009). Thematic analysis was used to code the material according to three categories derived from the literature review: first, the language used to describe externally derived frameworks compared with local frameworks; second, the institutional role and degree of authority assigned to local mechanisms within the overall process; and third, documented responses from local populations regarding the legitimacy of the resulting peace. These categories were then used to construct the cross-case comparison summarised in Table. One limitation should be noted: reliance on secondary sources means the analysis is shaped by the interpretive choices of the original authors, and the absence of primary fieldwork limits the chapter's ability to capture local perspectives directly and in their own terms. Nonetheless, this design is well suited to the comparative, theory-building aims of the chapter, and it provides the basis for the literature review that follows.

Theoretical Framework

The Liberal Peace and Its Cultural Assumptions

A substantial body of scholarship has documented how the dominant model of post-conflict peacebuilding often termed the 'liberal peace' rests on a specific set of institutional assumptions, including multiparty democracy, market-based economic reform, and formal rule of law (Paris, 2004). Scholars working within critical peace studies have shown that this model is frequently presented as a technical, apolitical template for reconstruction, even though it embodies a particular historical and cultural trajectory associated with Western state formation (Richmond, 2011). In post-conflict societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific, this dynamic is especially visible: institutions modelled on Western parliamentary or judicial systems have been introduced with limited adaptation to existing political cultures, often producing institutions that function on paper but lack local legitimacy (Mac Ginty, 2011). This literature establishes that the liberal peace model is not a neutral technical framework but a culturally specific one whose assumptions shape what counts as a successful peace. Building on this foundation, the next section considers how local and indigenous frameworks are positioned relative to this dominant model.

The Liberal Peace and Its Cultural Assumptions

The concept of 'local ownership' has become central to peacebuilding discourse, reflecting an apparent commitment to ensuring that affected populations shape the processes meant to serve them (Donais, 2012). However, scholarship examining how local ownership operates in practice has found that indigenous mechanisms such as customary courts, elder-led mediation, or communal reconciliation ceremonies are frequently incorporated only as supplementary or symbolic components within a process whose core architecture remains externally designed (Shaw & Waldorf, 2010). In Rwanda, for example, the gacaca courts drew on a pre-existing communal dispute-resolution tradition but were substantially reformed and formalized to align with the requirements of an internationally overseen transitional justice framework, raising questions about the extent to which the resulting institution remained recognizably local (Clark, 2010). This body of work demonstrates that the language of local ownership can coexist with a substantive hierarchy in which local mechanisms are valued for their symbolic or legitimizing function rather than treated as equally authoritative frameworks for justice. This theme connects directly to the question of representation addressed in the following section.

Representation, Voice, and the Politics of Knowledge

A third strand of literature draws on postcolonial theory to examine how knowledge about conflict-affected societies is produced, and by whom (Spivak, 1988). This literature argues that the design of peace processes is shaped not only by formal institutions but by prior representations of the conflict and the society in question — representations typically produced by external researchers, diplomats, and organizations whose frameworks of analysis are themselves embedded within particular academic and policy traditions (Sabaratnam, 2013). Two consequences follow from this. First, local actors are often positioned as sources of information to be analyzed rather than as analysts in their own right, a division of labour that shapes whose understanding of the conflict is treated as authoritative. Second, when local concepts of justice or reconciliation do not map neatly onto the categories used by external frameworks, they are at risk of being either reinterpreted to fit those categories or excluded from the process altogether (Mac Ginty, 2011). This representational dynamic forms the conceptual bridge to the integrated framework developed in the next section.

Towards an Integrated Framework

Taken together, the literatures on the liberal peace, local ownership, and the politics of knowledge point towards a common conclusion that has not yet been fully integrated into a single analytical framework. Specifically, cross-cultural conflict resolution processes appear to operate through a representational hierarchy in which externally derived frameworks are positioned as the default, universal standard, while local and indigenous frameworks are positioned as particular, supplementary, or in need of validation against that standard (Richmond, 2011). This hierarchy is rarely stated explicitly; rather, it is embedded in the institutional design of peace processes, in the categories used to describe local practices, and in the allocation of authority between external and local actors. At the same time, the framework must allow for variation: in some contexts, local frameworks have achieved a more substantive degree of authority, and these instances are analytically important because they indicate the conditions under which the hierarchy can be disrupted rather than merely reproduced. This chapter argues that the durability and legitimacy of cross-cultural peace outcomes can best be explained by the degree to which this hierarchy is reproduced or disrupted in a given process. This integrated framework structures the comparative analysis that follows, beginning with the case of Rwanda.

Comparative Analysis

Rwanda: The Gacaca Courts and the Limits of Hybridity

The Rwandan case illustrates the integrated framework with particular clarity. Following the 1994 genocide, the government revived the gacaca system, a pre-colonial community-based mechanism for resolving disputes, as the primary vehicle for processing the enormous backlog of genocide-related cases (Clark, 2010). Two aspects of this process illustrate the representational hierarchy at work. First, although gacaca was presented internationally as an authentically local alternative to formal courts, its procedures were substantially restructured to incorporate formal legal categories of crime, evidentiary standards, and sentencing guidelines drawn from the framework of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Rettig, 2008). Second, international assessments of gacaca's success were framed predominantly in terms of its contribution to formal legal accountability and reconciliation targets, with less attention paid to how participants themselves understood the process in relation to pre-existing communal norms. The result was a hybrid institution in which the local label was retained but the underlying logic was substantially reshaped by external legal frameworks. This had measurable consequences for legitimacy: survey-based research on participant experiences found that while many Rwandans valued gacaca's contribution to truth-telling and community-level acknowledgement, a significant proportion also reported viewing the process as coercive or as serving the government's reconciliation narrative rather than their own sense of justice, particularly where formal sentencing outcomes diverged from what communities considered an appropriate resolution (Clark, 2010). This evidence suggests that the gap between gacaca's local framing and its reformed legal content was not merely an analytical observation but was registered by participants themselves as a tension affecting the process's perceived legitimacy. This dynamic of formal incorporation generating mixed legitimacy outcomes recurs, in a different form, in the case of Timor-Leste examined next.

Timor-Leste: Customary Reconciliation and the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation

In Timor-Leste, the integrated framework helps explain the mixed reception of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, which incorporated a Community Reconciliation Process drawing on customary adat practices alongside its formal truth-seeking mandate (Kent, 2012). The Community Reconciliation Process allowed lower-level offenders to reconcile with their communities through locally recognised rituals, while the Commission's central truth-seeking and

reporting functions followed a format closely modelled on international truth commissionprecedents. This division produced a layered structure in which customary practices were granted a defined operational space, but the overall narrative and findings of the Commission — the elements most visible to international audiences were framed primarily in the language and categories of international transitional justice (Kent, 2012). As a result, the Commission was often evaluated, both domestically and internationally, primarily against the benchmarks of the formal framework, with the customary component treated as a complementary addition rather than a co-equal framework of accountability. Evidence on local reception supports this assessment of asymmetric legitimacy: research on participant perspectives found that communities generally regarded the Community Reconciliation Process itself as legitimate and meaningful, since it operated through recognisable adat procedures and produced tangible outcomes such as community service and acceptance ceremonies, but also found that many participants viewed the Commission's broader truth-seeking mandate and final report as a separate, largely external exercise with limited connection to local reconciliation practice (Kent, 2012). This divergence indicates that legitimacy was not uniform across the two components of the same institution, but tracked closely with which framework customary or international each component was perceived to belong to. This pattern of customary mechanisms occupying a defined but subordinate space is mirrored, with important variations, in the case of Northern Ireland discussed next.

Northern Ireland: Competing Narratives and the Politics of Dealing with the Past

The Northern Ireland case adds a further dimension to the framework by highlighting how representational hierarchies can operate between two communities within a single society, rather than only between local and external frameworks. Mechanisms for 'dealing with the past' following the Good Friday Agreement have repeatedly struggled to establish a single framework for truth and acknowledgement that is perceived as legitimate by both unionist and nationalist communities, each of which holds different understandings of victimhood, culpability, and appropriate forms of acknowledgement (McEvoy & Bryson, 2016). One consequence is that successive proposals for truth recovery mechanisms have been criticised by one community or another for implicitly privileging the other's narrative framework, even when the proposed mechanism was presented in neutral, technical language. Documented community responses bear this out: research on attitudes towards dealing-with-the-past mechanisms has found that

perceptions of legitimacy diverge sharply along community lines, with proposals framed in the language of individual human rights violations sometimes perceived by unionist communities as implicitly validating a narrative of state culpability, while mechanisms emphasising state security operations have been perceived by nationalist communities as inadequately addressing state violence (McEvoy & Bryson, 2016). This evidence demonstrates that, in a context with two competing local frameworks rather than one dominant external framework, legitimacy outcomes depend on which community's categories a given mechanism is perceived to embed, regardless of whether the mechanism's designers intended any such alignment. This case demonstrates that representational hierarchies are not reducible to a simple external-versus-local binary but can also reflect unresolved competition between domestic cultural narratives. This complication, together with the patterns observed in Rwanda and Timor-Leste, sets up a useful contrast with the case of Colombia examined next, where local and indigenous frameworks achieved a more formalised degree of authority.

Columbia: Ethnic Jurisdiction and a Partial Disruption of the Hierarchy

The Colombian case offers a partial counter-example to the pattern observed in the previous three cases, and is therefore analytically significant. The 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP established the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a transitional justice mechanism with an explicit 'ethnic chapter' that recognizes the jurisdictional authority of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities to apply their own justice systems to cases involving their members, subject to coordination with the national mechanism (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2020). Two features distinguish this case from the others discussed. First, rather than incorporating indigenous justice as a supplementary or symbolic component, the ethnic chapter formally recognizes indigenous jurisdiction as constitutionally grounded and co-equal in status, reflecting Colombia's broader multicultural constitutional framework dating from 1991 (Rodríguez-Garavito & Baquero Díaz, 2015). Second, this recognition has not been without tension: coordination mechanisms between the national jurisdiction and indigenous authorities remain contested, and some scholars note that the practical application of the ethnic chapter has been slower and less resourced than the main jurisdiction (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2020). Evidence on indigenous community perspectives reflects this gap between formal and practical authority: assessments of the ethnic chapter's early implementation have found that indigenous and Afro-Colombian representatives generally welcomed the formal recognition of their jurisdiction as

an improvement over previous transitional justice arrangements, while simultaneously reporting frustration at delays in establishing the coordination protocols needed for their jurisdiction to operate with the same practical effect as the national mechanism (Rodríguez-Garavito & Baquero Díaz, 2015). This pattern indicates that formal recognition can shift legitimacy perceptions in a positive direction even before practical authority is fully realised, but that a persistent gap between the two can itself become a source of renewed grievance. The Colombian case therefore suggests that the representational hierarchy identified in this chapter is not immutable, but that even formal recognition of co-equal status does not automatically translate into equal practical authority or into legitimacy that is fully secured. This qualified counter-example provides an important caveat for the cross-case conclusions presented next.

Cross-Case Comparision

The Table summarises the four cases according to the framework introduced, the local or indigenous mechanism involved, and the degree of authority and legitimacy outcome documented in each. Three patterns emerge from this comparison. First, in Rwanda and Timor-Leste, local mechanisms were retained in name but substantially reshaped by, or evaluated against, externally derived categories. Second, Northern Ireland illustrates that representational asymmetry can also arise between domestic communities rather than only between local and external actors. Third, Colombia shows that formal constitutional recognition of co-equal jurisdiction can disrupt the hierarchy at the level of design, even where implementation gaps persist. Together, these patterns indicate that the representational hierarchy identified in this chapter is a strong tendency rather than an inevitability, and that the conditions distinguishing Colombia from the other cases particularly prior constitutional recognition of legal pluralism merit closer attention in future research. This comparative summary provides the basis for the conclusions and suggestions presented in the final section.

Tab. 1: Comparative Summary of Cases

Case	External/Dominant Framework	Local/Indigenous Mechanism	Degree of Authority Granted	Legitimacy Outcome
Rwanda	ICTR-aligned transitional justice	Gacaca community courts	Local Label retained; procedures reshaped by formal legal categories	Mixed: high case throughput, contested local meaning
Timor-Leste	International	truth commission model	Community Reconciliation Process (adat)	Defined operational space for minor cases only
Northern Ireland	Technical/neutral truth-recovery proposals	Competing unionist and nationalist narratives	No	single framework accepted
Colombia	Special Jurisdiction for Peace	Indigenous	and Afro-Colombian ethnic jurisdiction	Constitutionally recognised
Timor-Leste	International	truth commission model	Community Reconciliation Process (adat)	Defined operational space for minor cases only
Northern Ireland	Technical/neutral truth-recovery proposals	Competing unionist and nationalist narratives	No	single framework accepted

Conclusion and Suggestions

Implication for Research

This chapter has argued that questions of legitimacy and durability in cross-cultural conflict resolution cannot be separated from questions of representation: which cultural framework is treated as the default standard, and which is treated as particular or supplementary, shapes how a peace process is perceived by the populations it affects. The two research questions guiding this chapter — how dominant frameworks represent non-Western understandings of peace and justice, and what consequences follow from this representational imbalance — are answered through the integrated framework developed here and summarised in Table 1 (Comparative Summary of Cases). On the first question, externally derived frameworks tend to occupy the position of universal standard, while local and indigenous frameworks are incorporated in ways that preserve their symbolic presence while limiting their substantive authority, with Colombia illustrating that this hierarchy can be disrupted at the level of formal design even where practical authority remains uneven. On the second question, the participant-level evidence reviewed across the four cases indicates that this representational imbalance translates into measurable and patterned legitimacy effects: legitimacy tends to track the framework to which a given component of a process is perceived to belong, such that hybrid institutions can be simultaneously regarded as legitimate in their locally-framed components and as externally imposed in their internationally-framed components, as seen in both Rwanda and Timor-Leste, while in Northern Ireland legitimacy diverges along the lines of which community's narrative a mechanism is perceived to embed. Two suggestions follow for future research. First, researchers should develop systematic methods for documenting how local populations themselves evaluate the legitimacy of peace processes, using categories drawn from their own frameworks of justice and reconciliation rather than only the categories used by external evaluators. Second, comparative research should examine the conditions — such as prior constitutional recognition of legal pluralism, as in the Colombian case — under which representational hierarchies are more likely to be disrupted, extending this framework to cases beyond the four examined here.

Implication for Research

For practitioners, this analysis points towards two suggestions. First, peacebuilding practice should consider design processes in which local and indigenous frameworks are involved not only in implementation but in setting the criteria by which the overall process will be judged successful, so that local frameworks shape the standard rather than being measured against it. Second, where formal recognition of local or indigenous jurisdiction is granted, as in Colombia, this recognition should be accompanied by resourcing and coordination mechanisms sufficient to allow practical authority to match formal status, since the Colombian case suggests that a gap between the two can itself become a new source of contested legitimacy. Taken together, these research and practice implications point towards the same underlying question: whose culture, and whose understanding of peace, is allowed to define what counts as a successful outcome. The chapter closes with a brief reflection on the author's own position in relation to this question.

A Note on Positionality

Given that this chapter critiques the privileging of externally derived frameworks of knowledge, it is appropriate to acknowledge the position from which the analysis itself is conducted. This chapter is written using the conventions, citation practices, and academic vocabulary of the English-language conflict resolution literature, and it draws primarily on sources produced by, or filtered through, international academic and policy institutions. In this sense, the chapter is itself situated within the representational hierarchy it describes, and its critique should be read as an internal critique — an attempt to use the tools of mainstream scholarship to question that scholarship's own assumptions, rather than as a vantage point external to those assumptions. Readers are encouraged to treat the analytical framework offered here as a provisional contribution to an ongoing conversation, one that would benefit from being read alongside scholarship produced from within the communities and traditions discussed.

References

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2), 27–40.

Brigg, M., & Bleiker, R. (2011). Mediating across difference: Oceanic and Asian approaches to conflict resolution. University of Hawai'i Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Clark, P. (2010). The gacaca courts, post-genocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without lawyers. Cambridge University Press.

Donais, T. (2012). Peacebuilding and local ownership: Post-conflict consensus-building.

Routledge.

Kent, L. (2012). The dynamics of transitional justice: International models and local realities in East Timor. Routledge.

Lederach, J. P. (1995). Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures. Syracuse University Press.

Mac Ginty, R. (2011). International peacebuilding and local resistance: Hybrid forms of peace. Palgrave Macmillan.

McEvoy, K., & Bryson, A. (2016). Justice, truth and oral history: Confronting the past in Northern Ireland. Queen's University Belfast.

Paris, R. (2004). At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict. Cambridge University Press.

Rettig, M. (2008). Gacaca: Truth, justice, and reconciliation in postconflict Rwanda. African Studies Review, 51(3), 25–50.

Richmond, O. P. (2011). A post-liberal peace. Routledge.

Rodríguez-Garavito, C., & Baquero Díaz, C. A. (2015). Calibrating coexistence: Indigenous jurisdiction within Colombia's plural legal order. In B. de Sousa Santos & C. Rodríguez-Garavito (Eds.), Law and globalization from below: Towards a cosmopolitan legality (pp. 238–265). Cambridge University Press.

Sabaratnam, M. (2013). Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace. Security Dialogue, 44(3), 259–278.

Sandvik, K. B., & Lemaitre, J. (2020). Ethnic justice in the aftermath of Colombia's armed conflict: Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. International Journal of Transitional Justice, 14(3), 436–455.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. Political Research Quarterly, 61(2), 294–308.

Shaw, R., & Waldorf, L. (Eds.). (2010). Localizing transitional justice: Interventions and priorities after mass violence. Stanford University Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), Marxism and the interpretation of culture (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Authors

Mudasser Awan, Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan.

Shamana Munawar, Lecturer at COMSATS University Islamabad, Wah Campus, Pakistan.

Iffat Khalid, Lecturer at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan.

Shafia Jamil, Lecturer at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan.