

KEY THEORIES IN PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE STUDY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary social science that currently borrows some of its theories from other disciplines to provide philosophical foundations, conduct methodological inquiries, and offer critical explanation for social conflict situations. This paper briefly examines the core propositions of some of the theories in PCS using a qualitative-descriptive methodological design to collect data from conveniently sampled secondary sources of peer-reviewed journal articles and texts, thematically analysed to ground findings. The study conclusively established among other findings that theory is important to PCS as applied social science to ensure rigour in scholarship, research, teaching, and practice. The study recommends mandatory incorporation of theory in every academic writing and further establish a database of applicable theories as a step to theory building of its own.

Keywords: conflict, peace, research, studies, theory.

Introduction

Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) are closely connected and almost inseparable terms and concepts. As an emergent twentieth century multidisciplinary field from critical experiences of wars and the need to avoid them in nature, Askerov and Barakat (2021) assert that PCS tends to borrow theories and frameworks from various disciplines to analyse and explain conflict at multiple levels. There is no overarching theoretical framework for the field hence this study is an effort at identifying and briefly discussing some of the mainstream theories available within the field of Peace and Conflict Research (PCR) without evaluating them for strengths or weaknesses. Every theory as a scientific law, must contain three elements, namely, assumptions, concepts (and/or variables), and propositions with which it seeks to explain, predict, or prescribe social phenomena of inquiry (Akinyoade, 2013; Naidu, 1996). The key concepts in PCR include peace, conflict, violence, nonviolence, justice, among others and act as the connecting framework holding other elements of theory together.

The discipline of PCS has become dominant in the Social Sciences but does not have a distillation of core theories readily available to researchers as a guide. PCS does not have a readily available compendium or glossary of theories and theorists. There is a gap in the knowledge base of applicable theories and the discipline needs to identify and crystallize the present core theoretical frameworks as an important step towards theory building of its own to support research, teaching, for Peace and Conflict Studies and Practice (PCSP).

This study examines three important issues which are; to examine key Peace and Conflict theories in the PCS area, to examine the core propositions of the key Peace and Conflict theories and to assess the impact of the theories in PCSP. This study employs a qualitative-analytical research method with descriptive data collected from secondary sources in PCS using convenience sample for desk review of embedded literature from peer reviewed articles and texts, and thematically analysed for findings. Convenience sampling technique is often used by social researchers based on ease, open access, affordability, availability, and time of the subject of study (Etikan et al., 2016).

Conceptual definitions

We make some conceptual clarification of the terms used in this study.

Peace

A process involving activities that are linked to development and reducing conflict (Ibeanu, 2006). Peace is not the absence of war but broadly understood to include many situations that guarantee positive human conditions and existence (Jeong, 2017). Peace is also a relationship existing in absence of direct physical violence (negative peace), and presence of basic human conditions (positive peace) (Galtung, 1967). A human condition that is rooted in justice and harmonious existence with the environment (Author, 2022).

Conflict

According to Rahim (2017) conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.). Conflict is actors and their actions in pursuit of incompatible and contradictory goals (Galtung, 2009). Conflict is the opposition of forces (Khan, 1988). The action of individuals or groups to realise their interests over those of others (Author, 2022).

Theory

Defined generally to mean a range of approaches that specify the scope of inquiry, lay out assumptions, provide a shared vocabulary among scholars, and clearly define and relate concepts in the form of principles and testable hypotheses and propositions (Weible, 2014). Theories are ways of thinking that are manifested in spoken or written words about contentious relationships that vary from a general approach or perspective to a set of deductively ordered postulations or principles that impact research and practice (Kriesberg, 2019). A theory is a body of thought and knowledge of high generality and contains a set of basic definitions, axioms, paradigms, and principles that are logically interrelated (Naidu, 1996). A systematised body of ideas constructed and independently applied in the explanation of phenomenon (Author, 2022). For PCS, theories that have been validated in PCR are generally either under the concept of peace or that of conflict.

Peace and Conflict

The terms as used in this work are not necessarily antagonists especially if the conflicting parties are nonviolent, less violent, and use non-lethal means of conflict resolution and transformation (Webel, 2007). Thus, scholars can combine one or more points of view from theoretical perspectives in the process of analysing social conflicts or as practitioners helping political leaders in policymaking to deal with them (Faleti, 2006).

Key Theories in Peace and Conflict Studies

Theory of Peace

Galtung (2005) propounded a mini theory of peace made up of two concepts of negative peace which implies the absence of physical violence, and positive peace which is the presence of harmony with the elimination of structures that inhibit human potential and performance, and which has become a major approach in PCS for removing conflict, solving it, or transforming it, and for understanding the different relations between peace thinking and social reality. Galtung (2008) argues that a grand theory of negative and positive peace designed to achieve security and conviviality based on the Japanese concept of *Kyosei* is possible in the twenty-first century PCS. Peace theorists in the twentieth century emphasise the concepts of social harmony, justice, nonviolence, security, and order consistent with transformative peacemaking and peacekeeping (Webel and Galtung, 2007). The theory of peace which is embedded in PCS has a number of closely related theories which also serve to explain, understand, predict or prescribe social phenomena.

The lay theories of peace according to Leshem and Halperin (2020) are based on the relative strengths of three meanings or interpretations of peace, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, corresponding to “the end of war” (negative peace), “harmonious relationship” (positive peace), and “justice” (structural peace). Although lay theories lack the rigour of scientific theories and not very popular in PCS, people rely on them to understand, interpret, and predict their social world and “what counts as one’s lay theory of peace is the balance between the three, namely, which interpretations dominate, and which are more

peripheral” (Leshem and Halperin, 2020: 379). Leshem and Halperin (2020) applied the lay theory of peace to the understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to propose a binational state solution. This theory can also effectively intersect with other theories and used in different aspects of a study. PCR scholars and practitioners find the lay theories of peace constructively useful and consequently may adopt them for studies.

Peacebuilding theory

Lederach (1997) is credited with the development of this theoretical framework following Galtung’s first use of the term peacebuilding (Gawerc, 2006). According to Sandole (2010) peacebuilding is a dynamic approach and framework for strengthening positive peace through some third-party interactions with different actors performing different tasks at the same time or at different points in time. Proactive peacebuilding would require third-party interveners to attempt and implement an intervention before a conflict occurs to “prevent the house from catching on fire” (Sandole, 2010, p. 13). Comprehensive peacebuilding is often undertaken for regional and global governance to deal with deep rooted causes of conflict from prevention through resolution to transformation.

Peacebuilding theory assumes that there is first a conflict requiring reactive or proactive intervention by a third party. Peacebuilding in theory and practice envisages a multilateral rather than a unilateral process of active prosocial civic engagements behaviours (author, forthcoming). Gawerc (2006) submits that peacebuilding must incorporate the critical elements of conflict resolution and social justice simultaneously while for Longpoe (2020) peace building theory addresses the underlying causes of violent conflict so that they become less likely in the future. This contemporary theory is effectively operative at all levels of conflict analysis and intervention in order to de-escalate the situation and restore normalcy for sustainable peace. It provides a conceptual and operational framework for reconciliation, distributive and restorative justice particularly in situations of recovery from mass violence, armed conflict, or violations of human rights. Adenyi et al. (2021) submit that peacebuilding is both a theory and a practical strategy for resolving and transforming conflicts and wherever

adopted and implemented substantially reduce agitations and social tension. This theory which has a communitarian social content is therefore important for researchers and policymakers for designing and implementing win-win policy outcomes. A distinct but related communitarian theory was coined in the mid-nineteenth century to provide the research perspective for studies in community traditions in contrast to Western liberalism. (Etzioni, 2015).

Maqoma (2020) argued in defence of communitarianism that Western ideas of unrestricted individual autonomy now used in defining an African has resulted in the imposition of negative ethnicity among Africans. Maqoma (2020) submitted that Africans are generally described as communal and who base their worldview on “communal thinking and values of generosity, compassion, benevolence, tolerance, kindness and goodwill that bring people closer together in order to achieve a common good of the community whether a single family or an entire country” (Maqoma, 2020: 1-2). Nowhere is communitarian theory better explained than in the concept of *Ubuntu* as a practical philosophy of justice and African humanism (Ndeche, 2022 January 17-19, paper presentation). The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) 1981 embodies some of the fundamental communitarian principles of African societies (Art. 27, ACHPR). The framework is especially important and significant in the analytical understanding and formulation of traditional African conflict intervention and peacebuilding strategies.

Theory of Justice

Rawls (1971; 1999) propounded a moral theory of justice based on equity and fairness in the distribution of goods for a well-ordered society and argue that peace is conditioned and regulated by a shared public conception of justice. It is a fair choice model in which individuals will hypothetically choose mutually acceptable principles of justice, equity, and liberty in their social interactions. According to Rawls (1971) the theory is a non-utilitarian justification of a democratic political order characterized by fairness, equality, and individual rights as first propounded by early social contract theorists. Rawls (1971) maintains that a theory of justice

is based on the existence of equal rights of individuals to basic liberties, equal opportunities, and in which the concept of an egalitarian society and specific political arrangements are important in the practical application and understanding of social democracies and social justice frameworks derived from it.

Theory of justice is so closely connected to the theory of law since antiquity where according to Aristotle, natural justice exists and flourishes in natural law. Rawls (1999) argue that the principles of justice inherent in the theory are what guarantees the rights derived from these principles and the social institutions constructed to protect and promote them as social justice or formal justice. Rawls's theory of justice according to Dutta (2017) assert that a good society is characterised by a number of virtues of which justice is the first, and the foundation of the social structure upon which all political and legislative decisions should be designed to fulfil its requirements. PCR and legal scholars find convergence in the theory for its distributive, retributive and restorative justice conceptual frameworks.

It can thus be argued that the closely connected social movement theory (SMT) which is a contemporary sociological theory was developed in the mid-twentieth century as a response to the political opportunity of protests and movements having intellectual agenda and seeking to explain why social mobilisation occurs, the forms under which it manifests, as well as potential social, cultural, and political consequences (Goodwin et al., 2001; Jasper, 2008; 2020). The application of the theory is effective and relevant to analytical studies of social justice, civil rights, environmental/ecological rights, animal rights, anti-war, and feminist movements both domestic and global, to give voice back to protesters. The theory provides the needed interpretive framework for an understanding of injustice.

Conflict theory

This was propounded by Karl Marx with the idea of materially based social classes engaged in a class struggle and competition over scarce resources with resulting inequality and conflict and found in every society. This is the dominant theoretical framework for scholarly understanding of social conflict, cohesion, and consent in modern society. Conflict theory was

first developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) in mid-nineteenth century to explain inequality and conflict resulting from struggle and competition between two antagonistic social classes (Hayes, 2022). The theory provides a classical and contemporary theoretical perspective of conflict from sociological, historical, and socioeconomic methods of analysis of power relations.

Later strands of the theory now look at other dimensions to analyse and explain a wide range of social phenomenon including wars, revolutions, poverty, structural inequality, discrimination, and domestic violence. Galtung (1973) maintains that a correlation exists between the two elements of conflict (incompatible) and (cooperation, such that they exist in balance to produce harmony or one predominating to produce disharmony. Some of the conflict analytical tools like the Conflict Tree (which sees the causes as root, the problem as the trunk, and the effects as the branches), and Onion/Doughnut PIN (position, interest, needs) developed out of the theory (Best, 2006). Social conflict theory, conflict resolution theory, conflict transformation theory, alternative dispute resolution methods, peacebuilding theory are built upon the elements contained in conflict theory (Faleti, 2006; Best, 2006). Social theory according to Joseph (2022) is a contemporary strand for understanding and explaining social conflict in modern society while Social Conflict theory (SCT) is a Marxist-based theory that argues that individuals and groups (social classes) interact based on conflict rather than consensus. Social conflict theorists like Marxists argue that class conflict or class war or class struggle exist in society due to antagonistic competition for scarce resources between the working class and the wealth owners.

The theory is relevant in the study and understanding of ethnic conflicts, religious wars, terrorists' activities, and how to manage and resolve them. Structural Conflict theory is a similar Marxist-based theory of conflict derived from stratification, distribution of resources, access to power and justice, which result in conflict. According to Loadenthal (2018), structural conflict theoretical framework developed in the twentieth century with the belief that conflicts are caused by oppressive patterns of human relationships. Loadenthal (2018)

state that structural inequality exists from conflict over means of production and which in turn fosters structural violence and conflicts. This theory when used in combination with Burton's "human needs theory" offers deep analytical insights and understanding of ways to promote positive peace and reduce negative peace in the society.

The Conflict Transformation Theory (CTT) propounded by Lederach (1996) is a contemporary theoretical framework for peacebuilding in the light of the dynamics and changing context in which social conflict occurs. The transformation concept of conflict is both descriptive of conflict dynamics including its impact, and prescriptive of the overall purpose that building peace pursues in a process-outcome paradigm. Galtung (1999) further contextualized the theory of conflict transformation in which there is no alternative to transforming, changing violent attitudes and behaviour, exploring, and engaging in peace dialogues and advocacy, with conflict transformation happening at all levels of conflict followed by peace transformation in the context of peace education. The importance of CTT is in its inclusive commitment to peacemaking, seeking the truth, healing relations, and promoting the concept of post-conflict restorative justice.

Realist Theory

Realism as the theory is also known according to Faleti (2006) traces its origin from classical political theory seeking to explain the root of conflict to flaw in human nature to be selfish and engaging in the pursuit of self-serving power. In international relations, the theory emphasizes the role of the state (state-centrism), national interest, and power in world politics and order. The theory was propounded by Carr (1939) and Morgenthau (1948) to explain state behaviour and a set of policy options for analytical response to application of state power in foreign policy and diplomatic studies. Waltz (1979), and Donnelly (2005) have further contributed to the realist theoretical perspective on understanding internal relations. The theory has three major strands based on their view of the essential causes of inter-state conflicts. The classical realists hold that conflict flows from and follows human nature,

neorealists attribute it to the dynamics of the anarchic state system, while the neoclassical realists believe it to result from both in combination with domestic politics.

This theory according to Faleti (2006), has greatly justified the militarisation of international relations, arms race, and finally elevating power and the state to the status of an ideology with tremendous impact on conflict at the international level. This theory in addition offers conceptual and analytical insights into why states possess and build armies and, in some cases, seek possession of nuclear weapons, even if for deterrence. Slaughter (2019) asserts that realist international relations theory focuses its account of world politics on the power of states and the ways in which they can act to assure their security and national interests. Realist scholarship contends that global cooperation and governance is conditioned and limited by the actions of powerful states (Slaughter, 2019).

To realists, international politics in modern times generally recognizes no authority above the nation-state and refuse to recognise any such supranational power and authority. Agreements among states are enforceable only by the agreeing states themselves. This assumption of anarchy poses a paradox for agreements to limit violence during wartime. (Bell, 2021). Reciprocity serves as the main tool to enforce agreements in international politics. Enforcement of an agreement is devolved to the parties themselves. Damaged parties have the option to respond with retaliatory sanctions to a violation of an agreement. The threat of reciprocal sanctions may be sufficient to deter violations, and so agreements can be enforced in international politics.

Realism is state-centric, sees states as rational actors, concerned primarily with national security and power, in which anarchy of the international system leads to perpetual fear, a development consistent with human nature that is inherently egoistic (McGlinchey et al. 2017; Bell, 2021). Realists view human beings as inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles. Consider the absence of government, literally anarchy, to be the primary determinant of international political outcomes. The lack of a common rule-making and enforcing authority means, they argue, that the international

arena is essentially a self-help system. Each state is responsible for its own survival and is free to define its own interests and to pursue power.

The idealist concept of the harmony of interests is based on the notion that human beings can rationally recognize that they have some interests in common, and that cooperation is therefore possible. Carr (1939) contrasts this idea with the reality of conflict of interests. According to Carr (1939) the world is torn apart by the particular interests of different individuals and groups. In such a conflictual environment, order is based on power, not on morality.

Values that idealists view as good for all, such as peace, social justice, prosperity, and international order, are regarded by Carr (1939) and Shaffer (2018) as mere status quo notions. The powers that are satisfied with the status quo regard the arrangement in place as just and therefore preach peace. They try to rally everyone around their idea of what is good. Carr (1939) nevertheless recognized that the logic of “pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible. Waltz created neorealist theory of international system noting differentiation of units which are primarily states and their capabilities, but also recognising the existence of nonstate actors. Waltz maintains that bipolarity based on the dominant two nuclear superpowers of US and Soviet Union at the time was much more stable than multipolarity. This has changed since the fall of Soviet Union, the rise of China as a superpower and the presence of India and other medium powers with potential for multipolarity realism. Burchill (2005) maintain that liberal institutionalism which agrees with neorealists acceptance of interdependence and mutual cooperation for common interest is responsible for reduction in conflict, geopolitical economic integration and global free trade. Current developments in human rights, humanitarian laws, diplomacy, commerce, among others are attributable to liberal democratic thoughts and which have advanced peaceful global order. Realist theory according to Morumbasi (2021) is Eurocentric and formulated based on purely Western political experience and expectations.

The international system is dynamic and ever changing. It has no African or Asian corresponding perspective.

Conclusion

Theories are critical and important to an understanding, analysis, explanation, prediction and prescription of conflicts by providing researchers and practitioners with necessary insights into the root causes, nature and effects, and initiatives for their prevention, management and resolution for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. While a unified theory of PCS may be desirable, it may be difficult to develop as the causes, levels, manifestations, and management intervention strategies in conflict situations are so varied with different actors and factors. It gives a connection between the objectives of study and the methodology for data collection, analysis, and findings.

In view of the above, the underlisted are thus recommended.

- i. PCS should establish a database of theories and theorists in the transdisciplinary field. The department can lead the effort in this regard with this modest contribution from our work.
- ii. It is recommended that every academic writing should incorporate at least a theoretical framework from the field as a basis of measuring rigour in teaching and research and, avoiding a disconnect from methodological foundations of scientific nature of PCS as an applied social science. This will no doubt incentivise theory-building in the field.
- iii. This study is work in progress and it is recommended that researchers and practitioners build on it for the growth and development of PCS

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