Theories of Peace and Social Conflict

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A b s t r a c t

Theories and concepts no doubt play a significant role in the study and analysis of conflict at any level hence, this paper examined theories of peace and social conflict with a view to finding lasting solution to the problems of insecurity, violence and social conflict across the world. The paper contends that peace and social conflict resolution strategies and methods can only be effective if a thorough conflict study and analysis is conducted. Data for the study were drawn from secondary sources while analysis was done qualitatively through content analysis. Findings revealed that the understanding of theories and concepts play a major role in the study and resolution of any conflict. The study also observed that conflicts are dynamic with many parts and components hence, it should not be approached or resolved from only one source or perspective. Peace, stability and social conflict can be addressed if nation-states embrace electoral and political reforms which will in turn promote good governance and socio-economic development.

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Background to the Study

Peace and conflict resolution studies as a discipline in the social sciences developed in phases and in stages from the realm of reasoning to the realm of theory construction and research. The realm of practice includes actions that particular persons or groups undertake to affect the course of conflicts. On the other hand, the realm of research includes the analyses that help test deductive theory and are the bases for inductive theory construction hence, good analysis of peace and conflict no doubt, helps to determine the strategy and tactics that are likely to be effective. As part of peace and conflict framework, the term "preventive diplomacy" was first proposed by Dag Hammarskjöld, former United Nations Secretary General from 1953 to 1961, since then, the concept has continued to evolve in response to new challenges. Within the context of the United Nations, preventive diplomacy is regarded as an integral part of broader peace and conflict prevention efforts and refers particularly to early diplomatic actions aimed at preventing new conflicts and the escalation of existing tensions into violence, as well as limiting the spread of ongoing conflicts (Jenca 2013). Boutrous-Boutrous Ghali, former Secretary-General of the United Nations also helped to internationalize the concept of peace and conflict when he presented his "An Agenda for Peace" document at the United Nations in 1992.

However, scholars whose works have contributed to peace and conflict resolution studies include: Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Adam Smith (1723-1790), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), and James Madison (1751-1836). The moral and practical issues related to dealing with various types of conflict were widely discussed, emphasizing the importance of reasoning. For instance, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote about perpetual peace resulting from states being constitutional republics while John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) wrote about the value of liberty and the free discussion of ideas. The concept of peace, conflict and the analysis of conflict will form the major thrust of this chapter.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The need for an analytical framework in an investigation was re-enforced by Lieber (1992) who contends that behind every concept or an analysis, there is a theory or viewpoint which makes it possible for the presentation and interpretation of facts. Clearly therefore, this study relied on the basic human needs theory in order to explain the subject-matter. Basic human needs scholars argue that certain human needs such as shelter, food, recognition etc. are necessary and fundamental. According to them, when these needs are absent the human being will be restless and disobedient to authority. Burton (1997) stated categorically that the needs of all individuals and groups must be accommodated in any decision making process to avoid rebellion and uprising against the state. This implies that conflict can be reduced or checked if there is adequate integration of views and positions in the political process. This theory is relevant in this context because it helps peace and conflict experts to design a peace process that reflects the underlying generic sources of conflict by providing the reason for connecting struggle examination with strife determination. Basic human needs scholars include: Burton (1997), Sites (1973), Maslow (1943), and Galtung (1990).

Conceptual Analysis

The concept of peace has been defined and analyzed differently by different scholars and researchers. According to Haavelsrud (1996) peace is a long term project that seek to bring about lasting and constructive change in institutions that maintain society. He added that peace is a tranquil, uncomplicated end state. In his words: "peace is only partly the absence of war and conflict". Scholars are however, of the opinion that peace is better maintained in democratic states where rule of law and fundamental human rights of citizens are respected and protected. The subject-matter peace can also be viewed and analyzed from the following perspectives (Theories):

1. **Philosophical Theory of Peace:** Scholars in this school of thought see peace as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence hence, peace from the philosophical stand point, is the pre-corruption state of man in society, as God established it. Consequently, philosophical scholars argue that peace is a state of perfection, an earthly expression of Gods Kingdom that is yet uncorrupted. Scholars in this school of thought include: St. Augustine of Hippo, John Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill etc.

2. **Sociological Theory of Peace:** Unlike the Philosophical definition of peace, the sociological definition of peace focuses on the social context hence, while normative philosophy addresses what ought to be, the sociological aspect of peace addresses what is. Sociologically, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms. In other words, peace is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and aspirations. Sociologists therefore argue that society can be analyzed using the structural functionalist and dialectical materialist's responses (perspectives). They argued further that society is expected to perform certain functions with the aid of structures such as schools, industries, parliaments, courts, armed forces etc. Structure in this context means a set of interrelated roles necessary for performing specific functions in any society hence, when structures perform their functions effectively, there will be peace, stability and order in the society. On the other hand, Robert K. Merton in his study on anomie and violence argued that when society makes it difficult for citizens to attain or achieve their set goals and aspirations, the citizens and individuals will devise unapproved means of achieving their goals and needs which explains the rate of crime and violence hence, sociologists attribute crime and violence to the failure of society and the state. The sociological theory of peace therefore states that peace is not feasible as long as society is divided along classes and factional groupings. Scholars in this school of thought include: August Comte (1951), Abraham Maslow (1943), Johanne Galtung (1990), John Burton (1997) and Quincy Wright (1942).

3. **Political theory of Peace:** According to the University for peace cited in Gaya Best (2006) "peace is a political condition that makes justice possible". This implies that politically, peace entails political order which means the institutionalization of political structures. In the words of Samuel P. Huntington, institutionalization means that political Structures acquire value and stability. According to him "in the absence of

institutionalization, there is a primacy of politics" hence, every group uses its unique endowments to pursue and enforce its interests. This no doubt explains why mobs riot, students' stage protests/ demonstrations; workers strike and soldiers organize coups. Political scholars therefore maintain that to create and ensure peace, politics must be mediated by stable structures and institutions thus, implying that citizens and the governed become more participant and political values like tolerance, bargaining and negotiation are made the norm. When the process of governance is open and transparent, it is argued that the citizens also become more rational and evaluative when dealing with political issues.

However, from the political perspective of peace, pace could be seen as a contractual pact meaning that that the parties to the pact, especially nation states, mutually respect the pact and recognize each other. For example, the peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty years war in Europe in 1648, marked the beginning of modern international order, which has remained relatively stable. Political scientists also argued that portraying peace simply as order could also be a way of perpetrating and perpetuating injustice and oppression of the underprivileged by the privileged classes (ruling class). Advocates of the political school of thought include; Vernon Van Dyke (1972), Hans Morgenthau (1978), James N. Roseau (1967), Kenneth Waltz (1964) and Claude Ake (1981). From the above analysis, it is obvious that that the concept of peace can be examined from different perspectives.

Theories of Social Conflict
 This aspect of the study examined the various theories that can be used to explain and analyze any given conflict and the factors responsible for the outbreak of such conflicts. It is however, important to note that a theory is an idea or belief that explains a given phenomenon. According to Encarta, 2004 cited in Best Gaya (2006) "theory is an idea or belief about something arrived at through assumption and in some cases a set of facts, propositions, or principles analyzed in their relation to one another and used, especially in science to explain phenomena. On the other hand, Adidu 2006 cited in Kalama (2012) defined conflict as the discord that arises when the goals, values or interest of different individuals or groups block or thwart each other's attempt to achieve their objective. In the same vein, Nelson and Quick (1997) also defined conflict as any situation in which incomplete goals, emotions, or behaviour Lead to disagreement or opposition between two or more parties. Basically, conflict occur as a result of disagreement or misunderstanding between groups, individuals, communities, regions and states hence, conflict can be personal, local, national or international depending on the variables and circumstances involved. The following theories of social conflict will therefore be examined in this study.
1. **Structural Theory of Conflict:**
This theory is anchored on the radical structural theory represented by the Marxist dialectical school led by Karl Max, Frederick Engels and the liberal structuralism represented by Ross (1993), Scarborough (1998) and the famous work of Johanne Galtung (1990) on structural violence. This theory addresses the reactions of individuals, groups,

cultures, institutions and societies to change hence, the structural theory of conflict argues that incompatible interests based on competition for resources as being responsible for social conflicts (Collier, 2000:2). Thus, the major argument of this theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. This, therefore, imply that if society is structured in a way that citizens are at peace, then such a society will not have restive citizens. On the other hand, the theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice etc as sources of conflict. Structuralists therefore, maintain that conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies where there is un-even distribution of resources and domination of one group or class by another.

2. **Realist Theory of Conflict:** Like the structural theory of conflict, the realist theory highlights the inherent and major causes of conflict to human nature which is seen to be selfish and engaging in the pursuit of personalized self interest defined as power. Realist scholars maintain that "competitive processes" between actors, primarily defined as states, is the natural expression of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive interests (Morton Deutsch, 1973). In his work on 'power politics', in politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace, Morgenthau, a leading realist scholar and an apostle of realism (1973:4) cited in Gaya Best (2006) argued that realism is a clear departure from idealism, a theory he accuses of believing in a moral and rational political order based on universally valid abstract principles. Rather than shy away from conflict, realist scholars maintain that actors should prepare adequately to deal with the outcome and consequences of conflict since it is inevitable. This explains why modern states engage in arms race, armament and the militarization of international relations.

3. **The Biological Theory of Conflict**: The view that human kind is evil by nature has a long history hence, the thinking that since our ancestors were instinctively violent beings, and since we evolved from them, man must bear destructive impulses. According to Thomas Hobbs, St. Augustine, Malthus, and Freud, human beings are driven by a natural instinct to self preservation. In the same vein, ST. Augustine (1948) and Neibuhr (1953), and other theologians referred to the linkage between violent behaviour and original sin in humanity. In their words: Humans are driven by a natural quest will to live will-to-power to seek power, personal security and survival at the expense of others around them. It is important to note that the biological theory of conflict also gave rise to the innate theory which posits that conflict is innate in all social interactions, and among all animals, including human beings. The theory is broad in coverage and is mainly applied in backgrounds such as human psychology, ethology, socio-biology (the use of biological theory to explain social and human behaviour), psychology (frustration-aggression theory by Dollard et al) etc. This theory further posits that humans are animals, albeit higher species of animals, and would fight naturally over things they cherish (Best Gaya, 2006: p. 46).

4. **The Frustration-Aggression Theory:** Scholars like John Dollard and his research associates helped to develop this theory in 1939 hence; the theory was further expanded and modified by Leonard Berkowitz (1962) and Aubrey Yates (1962). These scholars

argued that the most common explanation for violent behaviour stems from the inability to fulfill basic needs. Thus, the main explanation that the frustration aggression theory provides is that aggression is not just under-taken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume, but that it is the product of frustration and that in a situation where the legitimate desires of individuals are denied either directly or indirectly by the society or social system, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those he holds responsible or accountable. This theory clearly explained the situation in the Niger Delta region where the people accuse the Nigerian government of not meeting their development needs hence, prompting the youths to resort to arms struggle, bombing of oil flow stations, kidnappings, sea-piracy etc. As a result, the Nigerian government changed its strategy from militarization to nonviolence (amnesty policy) which is ongoing hence, continuous dialogue and negotiation is fundamental in any conflicts or political process.

5. **Physiological Theories:** This theory is in agreement with the biological, realist, theologians and others but added that the condition under which any conflict occur needs to be studied and evaluated hence, physiologists argue that even when humans have the capability to be aggressive, this capability remains idle until stimulated by necessity or encouraged by success. In the same vein, Paul MacLean (1978) and Lorenz (1966) cited in Best Gaya (2006) maintained that in other to understand how human brains reacts when people are under stress and threat, it is possible for a person to experience conflict between what he is feeling and what he is thinking hence, he posited that humans are naturally capable for being aggressive but do not display violent behaviour as an instinct. Scholars in this school of thought therefore concluded that when violence occurs, there is the tendency that it is being manipulated by a combination of factors within and outside the individual's ability and control.

6. **Economic Theories:** This theory is common among economists who try to provide economic explanations for the existence of conflict. They argue that the struggle and contest for economic resources and material gains accounts for conflict in most societies hence, Collier (2003:4) added that some people (commonly referred to as conflict entrepreneurs) actually benefit from chaos: while the overwhelming majority of the population are affected by the negative impacts of conflict: the leaders of armed formations that are actually perpetrating the violence often profit from the chaos. Economic theorists therefore contend that even when issues in conflict are packaged as resulting from ideological, racial or even religious differences, they end up as a contest over economic assets, resources or systems.

7. **Psycho – cultural Conflict Theory:** This theory explains the role of culturally induced conflict and how energy images are created from deep-rooted attitudes about human actions that are learned from early stages of growth in the explanation of conflict. Psycho-cultural conflict theorists therefore contend that even when there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people's ethics origin and the culture that is

learned on the basis of that ethnic origin is one of the must important ways of explaining violent conflict. Thus, identify is seen to be the reason for social conflicts that take long to resolve. According to them, the issue becomes worst if discrimination and marginalization of some ethnic groups is associated with the conflict. This position was corroborated by Bassey and Oshita (2007). According to them, "Ethnic identities and hatred are seen as the cause of violent conflict. However, more systematic analysis of the causes of civil wars and conflict to a global pattern that is better explained by political and economic factors as well as by the extent of ethnic, cultural and religions diversity in the society.

8. **Human Needs Theory**: The assumptions of the human needs theory is closely related to the Frustration-Aggression and Relative Deprivation theory in the sense that all humans have basic human needs which they seek to fulfill and that the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could affect them immediately or later, thereby leading to conflict (Rosati et al cited in Best Gaya, 2006:p.5). Burton (1979) refers to some needs as basic to the survival of man, such as food, shelter, sex and reproduction etc. Edward Azar names some basic needs like security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity and effective participation in the process that shape such identities (Azar, 1994:, Best Gaya, 2006:p.52). Basic human needs scholars therefore contend that needs for survival, protection, affection, understanding, participation, creativity, and identity are shared by all people, are irrepressible and have components (needs for recognition, identity, security, autonomy and bonding with others) that are not easy to give up hence, no matter how much a political or social system tries to frustrate or suppress these need, it will either fail or cause more damage on the long run.

9. **Systemic Theories**: Scholars in this school of thought argued that the reasons for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. However, systemic factors that lead to changes in peoples material comfort include environmental degradation that reduces access to sources of livelihood, uncontrolled population growth especially in urban centres, resource scarcity and its allocation through lopsided political processes and competition, the negative effects of colonial and cold war legacies, breakdown of cherished values and traditions that play crucial social control functions, wide spread poverty in the midst of plenty, the domination and marginalization of minority groups by those in the majority, and ethnicity. These according to systemic theorists are examples of systemic causes of conflict.

10. **Relational Theory**: This theory attempt to provide explanations for violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic and historical relationships between such groups hence, the argument is that cultural and value differences as well as group interests all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways. From the sociological perspective, differences between cultural values is a challenge to individual or group identity formation processes and creates the tendency to see others as intruders who have to be prevented from encroaching upon established cultural boundaries. It is important to note that all the above theories of

conflict are not without their challenges and short comings hence; they are applied based on prevailing circumstances.

In spite of the short comings in each of these theories, they no doubt offer some useful perspective to the understanding of conflict. The theories are also similar as all of them recommend approaches that recognize the needs and interests of all parties based in nonviolence. According to Kelman (1993) "each perspective or theory only adds to the pool of available knowledge on conflict resolution processes. In his words: Although they are analytically distinct as static points of departure, there is sufficient overlap among…Conflict orientations to blur their fine points of distinction.

Understanding Conflict Analysis
Conflict analysis is the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors, and dynamics of conflict which in turn helps development, humanitarian and peace building organizations to gain a better understanding of the context in which they work and their role in that context. It is instructive to add that conflict analysis can be carried out at various levels (e.g. local, state, regional, national and global etc) and seeks to establish the linkages between these levels identifying the appropriate focus for the conflict analysis is crucial while the issues and dynamics at the national level may be different yet linking the level of conflict analysis with the level of intervention hence, it is also important to establish systematic linkages with other interrelated levels of conflict dynamics since all of these different levels impact on each other. On the other hand, conflict sensitivity is about:
   1. Understanding the context in which you operate
   2. Understanding the interaction between your intervention and the context
   3. Acting upon the understanding of this interaction, in other to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.

Conflict analysis is therefore a central component of conflict-sensitive practice, as it provides the foundation to inform sensitive programming in terms of an understanding of the interaction between the intervention and the context.

This applies to all forms of intervention (development, humanitarian, peace building) and to all levels (project, programme and sectoral conflict) analysis will help to:
   a. Define new interventions and to conflict sensitize both new and pre-defined interventions (e.g. selection of areas of operation, beneficiaries, partners, staff, time frame)
   b. Monitors the planning stage interaction between the context and the intervention and inform project set up and day to day decision-making (implementation stage).
   c. Measures the interaction of the interventions and the conflict dynamics in which they are situated (monitoring and evaluation stage).

However, Simon Fisher et al, (2000) defined conflict analysis as those activities that are undertaken by any person doing anything, either directly or indirectly; to know as much

as possible about what is going in a given conflict. He noted that a good conflict analysis is key to opening up the problem being studied, to help toward providing more clarity to both professionals and lay persons about what is happening in that particular conflict. The belief and assumption is that without a proper understanding of the conflict, it will be very difficult to proffer solutions to it. Conflict analysis can also take the following forms: case studies, which entail detailed study of a particular conflict. A case study is a specific rather than a general research that is subjected to the rigour, methodology and procedure of conflict research. Fact finding is another method of gathering information about conflict. Fact findings are less thorough and could be done over a shorter period of time than case studies research. They are meant to give quick information to interveners, to clarify areas of doubt and to help them gain some understanding about what is happening in the conflict, the parties in the conflict, and who exactly to deal with in an attempt to de-escalate and transform the conflict. Analysis meetings are another method of conflict analysis used by non-governmental organizations. Usually, such workshops and conference are used to determine which parties to work with, assess potential risks and dangers and in the process, stimulate future attempts to transform the conflict. It is important to note that conflict analysis could take a variety of forms but the underlying objectives of every conflict analysis is to empower the conflict analyst or intervener with the right and adequate information as well as tool to intervene in the conflict with a view to transforming or resolving the conflict.

Analysis Showing the Basic Components of Conflict Analysis
This aspect of the study is crucial and fundamental because no conflict can be successfully resolved without first understanding its context and components. Every conflict situation entails a number of contexts and properties hence; this chapter will further examine the following basic components of conflict analysis:

1. **The Background and Context of the Conflict**: Since every conflict has a specific context, the analyst or intervener begins by first creating and describing the background to the conflict situation which shows the duration, the immediate cause, and the current events. The purpose of bringing in these historical narratives is to enable the analyst to make rational and precise decisions that will transform or resolve the conflict to the satisfaction of all.

2. **Stages of the Conflict:** Haven understood the background and context of the conflict, it is important to also note the stages of the conflict since each conflict has its dynamics, characteristics by different stages and phases of transformation and change. There is a consensus among conflict scholars that conflict is not a static phenomenon, but is expressive, dynamic and dialectical (Lederach, 1997: 65 cited in Best Gaya, 2006:65). Thus, Simon Fisher et al (2000) identified the following stages in the development of conflict:
   I. The pre-conflict period/stage when goals between parties are in compatible, which could lead to open conflict.

ii. Confrontation stage, at which point the disagreement becomes open or manifest and characterized by fighting, low levels of violence, search for allies by parties etc.

iii. Stage of crisis which represents the peak of the conflict. In violent conflict, it is the stage of war or intense fighting.

iv. Outcome stage where losers and winners will emerge while violence will decrease hence, creating room for dialogue and negotiation to commence.

v. The post-conflict stage will indicate whether violence has ended or reduced hence, it is the stage to address the underlying issues in the conflict. These conflict stages can also be called the conflict process or conflict progression. All these stages constitute vital points to note in conflict analysis.

3. **Perspectives of the Conflict:** This are usually stand points, beliefs, values and views that the parties to a conflict and other people hold about conflict. In most cases, perspectives are competing and conflictive because they emanate from the interests and positions of parties which may differ but a careful analysis may find areas of agreement as well in these perspectives.

4. **Parties to the Conflict:** This is also a key aspect of any conflict analysis hence, parties to the conflict refers to individuals, groups and entities who are involved in a conflict directly or indirectly. It is instructive to note that there are two main types of parties in any conflict namely the key actors (primary parties) and shadows (indirect or secondary parties) hence, conflict analysts must endeavor to unravel and identify all parties in order to conduct a thorough and independent conflict analysis.

5. **Positions, Interests, Needs and Fears:** In most conflicts, the different parties and contending forces will be pursuing either one or a combination of the above factors, whether consciously or unconsciously hence, it is imperative for conflict analysts to identify and present the positions, interests, needs and fears of the parties. It is believed that when needs, fears and positions are addressed, it will go a long way in addressing and resolving the conflict.

6. **Learn Lessons from Failures and Successes:** It is no doubt a fact that conflict analysis also serves as a learning process to analysts and interveners to learn from past mistakes. An attempt to probe into why past efforts fail will also improve the conflict analysis process.

Conclusion
From the foregoing, it is obvious that peace and conflict resolution studies developed in phases and stages hence, this chapter examined the various stages of its development, the concept of peace, theories of social conflict, understanding conflict analysis, and the basic components of conflict analysis. The study clearly revealed that the search for peace requires commitment and understanding while conflict itself is inevitable, complex and dynamic due to the unequal balance of power, unequal military and economic strength of

nations coupled with ideological differences (Kalama, 2007). It is therefore important for conflict students' scholars and researchers to be neutral, unbiased and objective in the course of analyzing or resolving any conflict at any level. In all, the understanding of the concept, perspective, background and context of any conflict will no doubt help the conflict analyst or intervener in carrying out an effective and diligent conflict analysis exercise.

Recommendations
Without peace and stability in a society, insecurity and conflict will be the order of the day hence; the following recommendations will no doubt help to address the problems of insecurity and social conflict in the society:
1. States and communities should embrace good governance by nominating and electing persons of integrity into leadership positions at all levels. This will no doubt help to carry everybody along.
2. States should be encouraged to adopt non-violent means in resolving conflict rather than rely on military approaches to conflict resolution. This has helped to escalate conflict in Afghanistan, Libya and other countries.
3. Only trained and qualified conflict experts should be allowed to conduct conflict analysis at any level. They should also be allowed to manage conflicts and also carry out conflict resolution mechanisms.
4. Leaders whose actions or inactions constitutes threats or cause conflicts should be arrested and prosecuted at the International Criminal Court (ICC) irrespective of the concept of immunity and sovereignty.
5. Non-governmental organizations and human rights groups should also be involved in the search for peace at all levels hence, they must be alive to their responsibilities by carrying out enlightenment programmes, workshops including peace building measures etc. such efforts will go a long way in complimenting the efforts of state actors and governments at all levels.

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