Evolution of Conflict Resolution as a Field of Study and its Impact on Conflict Resolution Processes and Approaches

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A b s t r a c t

The search for an appropriate conflict resolution method and framework compelled conflict scholars to launch anti-war campaigns at all levels. Hence, this paper examined the evolution of conflict resolution as a field of study and its impact on conflict resolution processes. The paper argues that conflict resolution as a field of study contributed immensely to the development of contemporary conflict resolution processes, framework and theories. Data for the study were drawn from secondary sources while analysis was done qualitatively through content analysis. In terms of theoretical framework, the paper adopted the idealist theory in order to explain the relevance of conflict resolution as a field of study. Findings from the study reveals that without clear cut conflict resolution guidelines and processes, conflict among states and groups would have been endless and chaotic. thus, there is need to strengthen peace building groups, institutes and organizations (United Nations, ECOWAS, AU. etc.) to develop more conflict resolution frameworks based on nonviolence.

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Background to the Study

conflict at any level or dimension constitute a threat to the society and people in the affected area hence, the study and analysis of conflict and the methodology for it resolution is very fundamental and necessary. For Herman Khan (1968), conflict is inevitable due to unequal balance of power, unequal military and economic strength of nations coupled with ideological differences. Louis Kriesberg (2005) in his book titled international conflict resolution: The US-USSR and the Middle East cases, observed that in social life, conflict is inherent and occur within and among groups, organizations and communities including nations. He reiterated that conflict resolution and management require constant attention to prevent its escalation into intense violence hence, he cautioned that in the process of conflict resolution and management, scholars and managers should note that defeat is never total while victory is also never permanent. The concept of conflict and the study of how it can be addressed are therefore necessary and fundamental. It is on record that conflict at the global level has led to the destruction of lives and properties. The impact of conflict can also be felt by neighboring states due to refugee crisis arising from the displacement of people from their original communities and states. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine clearly shows that conflict at any level requires strategic response and attention by all stakeholders and organizations such as the United Nations. It is in the light of the above problems that this paper examined the evolution of conflict resolution as a field of study and its impact on conflict resolution processes amongst states.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The study adopted the idealist theory in order to investigate the subject-matter. The idealist political theory emphasizes the need for the establishment of guidelines, rules and laws to guide and direct human behavior and interactions. Idealists argued that such rules or guidelines should be accepted by all parties and citizens. Idealist scholars maintained that the establishment of rules and principles guiding human existence prevents crisis from degenerating into conflict. According to them, issues will be addressed at the dialogue table. Scholars in this school of thought further argued that peaceful resolution of conflict is cheaper and better than resolving conflict through the use of force or violence. The idealist political theory is suitable for the study because conflict resolution as a field of study also emphasizes the need for rules and procedures and processes that can aid easy and early conflict resolution and management. Advocates of idealism include Joseph Nye, Boutrous Boutrous Ghali etc.

Conceptual Analysis

Concepts and theories help to guide a study to its logical conclusion hence, their importance cannot be over emphasized. This section of the study will focus on the concept "conflict resolution": According to Francis (2006), conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups, individuals and organizations. He reiterated that violent conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of compatible and particular interests and goals. In his words; conflict arises in the society due the fact that each of us possesses different opinions, ideas

and sets of beliefs. We have our own way of looking at things and we act according to what we think is proper hence, we often find ourselves in conflict in different situations. Consequently, conflict influences our actions and decisions in one way or another (Brad; 2013: p 4). It is important to note that conflict can occur at any level hence, it is considered international in two instances; when it takes place across national boundaries and the primary actors are sovereign states. Kriesberg (1982) in his book titled international conflict resolution: The US-USSR and the Middle East cases observed that in social life, conflict is inherent and occur within and among groups, organizations and communities. He noted that conflict resolution and management require constant attention to prevent its escalation into intense violence. Other concepts examined in this section of the study include:

Conflict Resolution: Conflict usually occur when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aim is to eliminate their rivals. Conflict resolution within the context of this study refers to the struggle for power and resources and the means and measures of resolving the contest or struggle.

Evolution: This refers to the origin or beginning of a thing hence, the term evolution in this study refers to the beginning of conflict resolution as a discipline.

Impact: This refers to the reaction or response from an action or situation in this case; impact means the result or consequences of adopting contemporary conflict resolution measures and strategies.

Evolution of Conflict Resolution as a Field of Study and its Impact on Conflict Resolution Processes
According to Ramsbotham etal (2005), evolution of conflict resolution as a field of study can be narrowed down to five main perspectives or phases in terms of generations. These include:

1. **The First Generation 1918-1945**: Conflict scholars during this period are referred to as **"the precursors of conflict resolution".** This period was pioneered by scholars like David Davis who vigorously pursued the initiative of creating a conflict resolution field and peace research which started the anti-war sentiment that arose following the failure of states and stakeholders in preventing the outbreak of the First World War thus, the aim of conflict scholars at this stage was to develop a science of peace that will provide a positive basis for preventing future wars hence, the institutionalization and development of the conflict resolution field were pre-figured and pre-conceived in the hearts of early scholars in Europe between 1919 and 1939. Institutions that contributed to the emergence of peace and conflict resolution within this period include; the League of Nations, the works of Mary Parker Follet which focused on organizational behavior and labour management relations. Other important contributions made during this phase include early empirical studies of war and conflict conducted by Russian

Pitirim Sorokin, Lewis Fry Richardson and Quincy Wright (Ramsbotham etal 2005). The conflict resolution field was equally influenced by nonviolent and pacifism ideologies such as the works done by Gene Sharp and Indira Ghandi, who improved the understanding of violent political conflict and proposed alternatives to it. During this early stage, conflict resolution techniques and approaches were seen and observed as tools for transformation while the conflict resolution field is situated within a longer scale which now embraces the new world order, human security and nonviolent peacemaking (Wood house, 1999 as cited in Ramsbotham etal 2005).

2. **The Second Generation 1945-1965**: This phase is in response to the threat of nuclear weapons across the world. The founders of conflict resolution led by Ramsbotham etal (2005) argued that the establishment of peace research Laboratories in the United States is in response to the spread of nuclear weapons especially the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the words of Theodore Lentz, people can live in harmony and that humanitarianism may occur from human attitudes and personality. Thus, the establishment of journals and research centers during this period contributed immensely to the development of conflict resolution as a discipline. The initiation of the Journal of Conflict Resolution (JCR) in Michigan by Kenneth Boulding in 1957 and the creation of the Center of Research on Conflict Resolution in 1959 greatly influenced the development of the subject-matter. In the same vein, Quincy Wright's article on World Intelligence Center published in the Journal of Conflict Resolution also pioneered current understandings of early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. It is also important to note that the works of Boulding and other scholars focuses firmly on prevention of war through the restructuring of international organizations and the development of research and information capability. Thus, Woodhouse and Miall (2005) posited that conflict resolution practice within this period was geared towards the development of knowledge base in which social data stations which will in turn gather a range of social, political and economic data to produce indicators to identify social temperature and pressure in other to predict cold or warm conflict situations. From the United States, the development of conflict resolution spread to other parts of Europe, the conflict resolution field emerged with the founding of the Journal of Peace Research in 1964 by Johan Galtung in Norway and with the establishment of the Center for the Analysis of Conflict by John Burton in England. It is on record that Galtung introduced the concept of the conflict triangle and further categorized violence into direct violence, cultural violence and structural violence. Johan Galtung also distinguished between positive peace and peace perceived as absent of direct violence. On the other hand, John Burton developed a new paradigm in conflict studies which contributed to the expansion of conflict resolution techniques to the international arena. While describing this stage as a leap forward in the development of conflict resolution, Mary Parker Follet noted that her work on mutual gains was applied in family conciliation work, community

mediation and alternative dispute resolution. All these theories, research proposals, and findings helped to shape the process of conflict resolution and management across different parts of the world. Burton (1990) who synthesized the main theoretical assumptions of conflict resolution which are known as human needs theory. In this theory, Burton (1990) stated categorically clear that conflict occur as a consequence of frustrated human needs which includes control, security, justice, stimulation, responses, meaning, rationality, role defense and esteem.

3. **The Third Generation 1970-1989:** This period marked the consolidation of the conflict resolution field. During this period, conflict resolution defines its specific subject area in relation to three great projects based on the avoidance of nuclear war, removal of inequalities and injustice in the global system, and the achievement of ecological stability and management. Basically, conflict resolution field during this period attempted to formulate a theoretical understanding of destructive conflict in order to provide suitable practical responses at the following levels.
    a) The domestic politics level, where conflict resolution work went in to the building up of capability in family conciliation, labour and community mediation including alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
    b) The level of definition, analysis and prescriptive thinking about what was previously described as "deep rooted conflicts" by Burton (1990), intractable conflict by Kriesberg etal (1989 or protracted social conflicts by Azae (1990) as cited in Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2005). The above scholars made a distinction between international and domestic level causes of conflict. Other scholars and researchers who contributed immensely through their research centers, institutes, laboratories and theories during this period include Adam Curle's track II "mediation (citizens diplomacy or multi-track diplomacy), Elise Boulding who introduced the idea of imaging the future, an influential path way which enabled people to break out of their cynical private shells into the public space

4. **The Fourth Generation 1985-2005:** Reconstruction of conflict resolution field. During this period, scholars and peace practitioners across the world started creating and experimenting with structures and practices for preventing, managing and transforming violent and destructive conflict into acceptable peace building mechanisms.

5. **The Fifth Generation of Conflict Resolution 2005- Date:** This period witnessed the emergence of new sets of theories, actions and mechanism challenged by the necessity of permanent innovation and refining of the field to adapt to modern approaches. This stage of conflict resolution therefore advocated for modern strategies in addressing contemporary issues such as terrorism, insurgency and

counter-insurgency measured. This development led to the emergence of global and regional conflict resolution structures and institutions. Emphasis was based on nonviolent peace building measures (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Maill, 2005)

Conclusion
From the foregoing, it is clear and obvious to note that the evolution of conflict resolution as a distinct field of study started in phases from the period of the super-power rivalry (1918-1945) which witnessed the use of military force and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. As reflection in the study, the reasoning and perception of leaders began to change towards peace building and conflict prevention. This process was intensified from the fifth generation (1945-1965, 1970-1989, 1989-2005, 2005-date) when scholars and researchers have succeeded in establishing research centers, laboratories, problem solving theories and frameworks. The gains recorded from the evolution of conflict resolution attracted global attention and recognition when the former Secretary General of the United Nations Agenda for peace document to the UN General Assembly, laying out a framework for international conflict resolution that has evolved to this present day. Findings from the study also revealed that the evolution of conflict resolution contributed immensely to the eradication and reduction of conflicts at the regional and global level through the signing of treaties such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty 1 and 2 (SALT 1&2), Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and several arms control measures and principles in the United Nations Charter. In all, the study advocates that contemporary international relations should encourage and promote nonviolent peace-building measures (diplomacy) rather than violent confrontation and war.

Recommendations
The recommendations in this study will no doubt help to promote international peace and security through the adoption of effective conflict resolution processes and frameworks:
1. Conflict resolution experts and researchers should move beyond the formulation of theories to practice by engaging in aggressive public enlightenment and education on the dangers of war, violence and conflict.
2. Adequate sanctions should be meted out to perpetrators of violence and conflict in order to serve as deterrence to others.
3. The scope of conflict resolution as a field of study should be expanded beyond peace building and conflict prevention to include pre-conflict and post-conflict peace education and resettlement of victims of conflict.
4. Members states of regional and international organizations should be held accountable for violation of existing peace treaties and human rights abuses hence, any immunity they enjoy under any guise should be ignored in the course of investigation and prosecution.
5. The study of conflict resolution as a discipline should be extended to secondary schools in other to properly equip and guide the younger generation of the need to promote peace and nonviolence at all levels.

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