

Revisiting Conflict and its Impact in Social Cohesion

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Abstract: This article discusses the role of conflict in society and the associated human relations. Through this article is aimed to give a reflection of sociological and political theories on conflict. A competitive society can be based only in a well-educated population, undressing it from all types of prejudices and discriminatory features and problems. To analyze existential and vital elements such as ethnicity, security, stability, stereotypes etc. for the society and the possible reasons why these represent causes of relationships under conflict, research of theoretical and factual data that influence these relationships need to be done. The main purpose of the study is the confrontation of sociological and political theoretical approaches as two different viewpoints of the same issue, which brings innovation in the crosscut and changes of these relationships in conflict. Democratic rights, economic strength – and how it is distributed – social cohesion, Environmental balance and well educated people cannot be separated in today's world. We need more than ever to deal with our common future in a holistic way. The only way democracy will prove itself is through a living relationship between peoples and their governments based on trust, accountability and the determination to deliver practical results. Therefore, the presentation of different theoretical views through the paper will diversify it and will make the picture much more comprehensible.

Key words: conflict, theoretical view, social groups, social transformations

What Conflict and Social Cohesion represent

Nature of Conflict

Individuals and groups struggle to maximize their benefits, inevitably contributing to social changes such as innovations in politics and outright revolutions. People tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as religious affiliation, gender, ethnic groups, organizational membership and age cohort etc. Conflict this state of coming to collision or disagreement, fight, struggle and many times wars, is a process; part of it are many actors that may be individuals, social groups, parties or states. They are in threat to their needs, interests or concerns or ideas.

Social cohesion represents the bonds that bring people together in society, particularly in the context of cultural diversity. In other words it means sharing values, reducing disparities in wealth and income and enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and that they are members of the same community. So, a cohesive community is one where there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighborhoods. If we analyze conflict in different levels between individuals, groups within a society individuals and state we come to the conclusion, which usually it derives from lack of material goods, lack of fortune or lack of interests.

The society is always in a continual struggle among all different aspects of a particular society. The need of maximizing its benefits the group sometimes uses physical violence and there are times where no violence is involved. Incompatibilities, which can prompt conflict, include power or value differences, or differences in needs-satisfaction. Apart sharing sources, maximizing their benefits conflict between groups encourages negative stereotyping of the opposing group and reshaping society the way they see it or in the best way to fulfill their interests. Individuals tend to attribute positive personal characteristics to in group members and excuse their negative behavior. These biases lead people to attribute negative characteristics to out-group members. Conflicts are given birth by different causes like class, gender, race and ethnicity, regions and religion.

There are many ways of expressing conflicts or divergences like wars, revolutions, strikes¹ as a method in the modern society, competition and dominations. Sometimes conflict is considered as a process of no co-operation between individuals and groups within a society. Conflicts may be caused by or result in the breakdown of law and order, or a

¹ Tactics in Non- Violent conflicts

collapse of state institutions. For example, there are also cases where conflicts are caused as a result of the prohibition of freedom of expression that implies infringement of a number of rights that are considered universally as fundamental.

According to Simmel, conflict makes possible social evolution. Evolution, change and conflict are inevitable. Conflict is a form of socialization and it shows a kind of social relationship. In the basement of these relationships are psychological elements or individual ones such as need, hate, envy, will etc. Conflict is reflected also in the relations and dynamic behaviors between individuals.

Marx recognized that the situation of laborers is determined by the objective organization and formulas of the productive system, independent of the will and power of individual persons the personal embitterment incident to the struggle in general, and to local conflicts exemplifying the general conflict, necessarily diminishes.

The trend in global conflict since the end of the cold war at the beginning of the 1990s— that most of the serious violence in the world is seen in settings of social conflict in struggles that are internal to the borders of the states which make up the world system—continues.

Theoretical approaches on Conflict

Theory and research on aggression and violence include the position that aggression is instinctive, deeply rooted in human nature and psyche, as well as argument that it is a secondary motive deriving from general response to frustration or from social reinforcement.

K. Lorenz "ethological approach" tried to "extrapolate war from human instinct". Such approach justifies war itself, in part by diminishing our own human responsibility to behave more peaceful. Nether the less, in his book "On aggression" he stressed some certain species-preserving aspects of aggressions applied to human beings as well: providing an opportunity for competition within a species, after which the most fit, will emerge to produce the next generation. Achieving spacing and population control, to minimize the disadvantages of overpopulation establishing a means whereby the pair bond can be strengthened, as by shared aggression of a mated pair against competitors.

Some scientists have even argued that men, because they have Y-chromosomes, are by nature violent, that violence is inherent to the male species, stemming from high levels of testosterone in the male.²

Other theories suggest that aggression is the results of hostility brought about by frustration. According to this approach human beings are goal- oriented and as long as they make progress toward achieving their goals they don't become frustrated and consequently violent. Frustration builds up to a point where it gets released in aggressive behavior. Freud emphasized that violence is deeply rooted in human nature and the ways to deal with these aggressive drives is to channel them constructively and learn nonviolent ways of expressing them.

Other theories concerning individual aggression and violence emphasizes the role of social conditioning in aggressive behavior. According to this approach, human beings acquire violent behaviors by observing friends, family members, images in the culture, and significant others. Since human beings learn violent ways to express their aggressive tendencies, they will practice violence if they get rewarded for it.

There are many factors that can bring individuals to violent behavior or actions such as:

- Collective power of group, state or nation can be used to wage war, when people identify with these collective bodies and want to defend their group interests when they are threatened.
- Aggressive actions of individual leaders play an important role in building public sentiment to support warlike actions.
- Displaced aggression, where a frustrated person may not be able to express his or her frustrations at the cause of ill feelings, so he/she places them on some other source, such as the "commies", or other groups which are said to cause evil in the world.
- Promoting militarism, when people desensitized to violence when they are constantly exposed to violent images.

There is a strong correlation between these two terms and processes: 'identity' and 'conflict'. Identity salience can be defined as the most important identity for individual and it can be influenced by such factors as permeable/ impermeable group boundaries, positive or negative intergroup comparisons, identity distinctiveness issues and socialization

² Laurel, H (1978) *The violent sex: male psychobiology and the evolution of consciousness*. Guerneville CA: Bluestocking, 132

processes³. Persons with strong ethnic identity salience have strong feeling of their group memberships, evaluate their group positively, prefer or are comfortable with their group membership, are interested in group, its culture and history. Ethnic identity salience may have both stable and situational characteristic. Ting-Toomey notes, that "for some individuals, ethnic identity only becomes salient when they are forced to confront interpersonal issues of" being different" like stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. This problem is one of the questions in reconciling two dominant approaches for understanding of identity: instrumentalism and primordialism. Instrumentalists suggest that ethnicity does not emerge naturally, but is a result of socialization under elite and communal pressures and orientations into the life ways of one's dominant community, and implicitly suggest the dominant role of the elite's manipulation of cultural difference as a causal factor in interethnic conflict.

On the other hand primordialists suggest the ubiquity of ethnocentrism and insist that ethnic similarity leads to interethnic conflict. The concept of ethnocentrism closely parallels these ideas in its explanation of ethnic and other group conflict.

Salience of different group identities may derive from different factors such as differentiation between individuals, in abilities and material goods. In context of intergroup relations people perceive other group in terms of out-group. In this case, judgments of out- group members tend to be made on the basis of intergroup comparisons whereas judgments of in-group members can also be made on the basis of intragroup comparison. The out- group homogeneity effect leads to perception of out- group as more homogenous than in-groups. Social identity tends to be more salient in situation of intergroup relation than in situation of interpersonal relation. Strongly identification with group became a powerful source of identity, and putting down other groups may increase self-esteem and provide the group solidarity, these behaviors may also lead to exaggerations of group differences and conflict between groups. This creates a kind of division between 'us' and 'they'.

Conflict as a process or state as we mentioned above of disagreement, fight, struggle and many times wars is a process, part of it are many actors that may be individuals, social groups, parties or states. The most meaningful definition of "state fragility" is one that highlights a state's vulnerability to conflict.

In situations of weak states, unequal distribution of resources, unstable social relations, a history of violence, and the existence of continually excluded subordinate groups, the emergence of mobilized resistance or 'political entrepreneurs' who organize for violent conflict is more likely to occur. The consequences may be political breakdown, civil war, inter-group riots, acts of violence, mass protests against the state, and in the worst instances crimes against humanity. (Large, J. & Sisk D.T, 2006)

Peace versus conflict

Usually conflict passes these general stages:

- general recognition
- escalating intensity
- fluctuation at a high level of antagonism
- going through a transition that leads to significant de-escalation
- explicit or implicit bargaining sometimes leading to an agreed-upon out-come
- consequences that affect the next set of conflicts.

Most common types of conflicts are:

- regional conflicts between local rivals, or between arising power and established major power.
- resource war sparked by conflicts between states or groups over the control or possession of vital water, energy, or mineral supplies.
- separatist and nationalist conflicts, involving attempts by subordinated ethno-nationalist groups to establish their own nation- state
- irredentist conflicts, involving efforts by a particular ethno-nationalist group or expand the boundaries of its current state to encompass neighboring areas inhabited by members of the same group.
- ethnic, religious, and tribal power struggles, entailing conflicts within states over the distribution of land, jobs, aid funds and other national resources.

³ Berry et al., (1989); Brewer, (1991),(1996); Tajfel & Turner,(1979); Turner, (1987)

- revolutionary and fundamentalist struggles, involving efforts by ideologically motivated movements (including religious fundamentalists) to impose a particular type of social system on a country through the use of force.
- prodemocracy and anticolonial struggles, entailing efforts by unrepresented or colonized peoples to achieve freedom and democracy.

Above we pointed out what conflict and social cohesion represent and what are some of the demonstrations of conflict. If conflict actions were accompanied by violence, peace is a state characterized by lack of violent conflict or absence of hostility. What reigns in these conditions is harmony between individuals, social groups or states.

One of the strategies of peace is what is called as 'peace through strength', which meaning requires massive armaments coming from Roman proverb "if you desire peace, prepare for war" and it's often discussed in terms of balance of power. Another strategy is pacifism as total absence of war making and the use of violence in daily affairs. Peace with justice implies that peace can be attained by eliminating social oppression and economic exploitation and concerned with poverty, disease, starvation, human misery and violation of human rights.

Institution building strategy tries to avoid war by creating legal and political alternatives for resolving international conflicts; it is called "peace through politics".

And in the end peace education attempts to teach people about peaceful conditions and the process of creating them and hopes not only to inform people about the various aspects of human conflict but also to teach skills of conflict resolution.

Peace is a movement toward war expressed in three different ways: like eliminating war, stop particular aspects of war and stop particular war.

Approaches to peace building as a difficult and delicate process including three steps or processes:

- Peacemaking means helping to bring parties in conflict to a negotiated agreement and refers to efforts to resolve de-escalated conflict that has erupted and persisted.
- Peacekeeping involves keeping hostile parties from fading or otherwise doing damage to each other, refers to efforts to sustain a cease-fire that has been agreed to by the belligerents, usually by providing a small buffering force between them.
- Peace building includes such methods as human rights education, economic development and development aid and the restoration of intergroup harmony in a post conflict phase and refers to efforts to heal the wounds of war in such a way to discourage future outbreaks of fighting.

Peacekeeping is the preventions, containment, moderation and termination of hostilities between or within states, though the medium of peaceful third party intervention organized and directed internationally, using multinational forces of soldiers, police and civilians to restore and maintain peace. It includes enforcement action (non- military and military).

Conflict resolution practice has expanded into five major new domains in recent years:

- International governmental organization efforts. International governmental organization has established centers that employ conflict resolution procedures. For example, Conflict Prevention Center in Vienna (CPC).

- Nongovernmental organization efforts

- Nongovernmental organizations facilitate international conflict resolution and are based in academic research centers, religious bodies and independent institutes. Their activities can include providing training for negotiators, developing policy recommendations, participation in mediation effort.

- Institutionalization. Institutionalization means, that conflict resolution practices have become institutionalized within and among many organizations. For example, community disputes resolution centers or using of negotiation before issuing a regulation.

- Training. Training in negotiation and conflict resolution is increasingly being given in professional schools, including those in law, management, and public administration.

- Stages of conflict. Conflict resolution being applied to many stages of conflict in addition to the stage of de- escalation negotiation: developing strategy to bring adversaries to the negotiation table, to prevent a dispute from escalating into a major destructive conflict, reconciliation, strengthening the relationship during post-settlement stage and so on.

Conclusions

By increasing and reducing disparities we build an impact on bonds of society that define 'social cohesion'. These disparities can go beyond cultural and social context and feed into a very fragile milieu by instigating aggressive actions between individuals, groups and state. On the first hand we may have disparities rooted in economic factors and/or distribution of material goods, social stereotypes, regional differences and identities. On the other hand, a fragile milieu would represent instability of circumstances and factors that affect our social construction.

Here the question answered is not whether conflict affects social cohesion. This is by all means evident and easily identifiable. The answer becomes complex when we try to measure scale of impact a conflict has in society by increasing its disparities. By achieving this, defining indicators and consequences, we are able to build effective responses in our efforts to reduce such disparities, and in turn enable a more cohesive society.

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