THEORIES IN PEACE AND CONFLICT RESEARCH

Demola Akinyoade[1] (PhD)

(A paper presented at the International Conference of the Society for Peace Studies and Practice (SPSP), "Defining and Rethinking Peace and Security Systems in Transitional Democracies" Venue: Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Date: March 25th-27th 2013)

[1] Peace and Conflict Studies Unit, Department of Political Science and International Studies, College of Social and Management Sciences, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria; demola.akinyoade@abuad.edu.ng, +234 805 770 2787

Abstract

Theory is the fourth cornerstone of the science business. With the aid of appropriate logical framework of techniques, that is, methodology, scientists use theories to link the philosophical foundations, comprising ontology and epistemology, to empirical data, thereby completing and validating their investigations as scientific enterprises. The paper examines the nature, origins and role of theory and stresses its centrality to empirical and analytical works in Peace and Conflict Research (PCR) as an applied (social science) research. It lists twenty-five theories in PCR and classified them using the core distinction issues in Peace and Conflict Studies and the traditional classifications based on agency and structural and political economy. The paper also presents and discusses the tension between theory verification and theory generation in Peace and Conflict Research. It makes a case for theory generation PCR of African peace and conflict dynamics by African peace and conflict researchers.

Keywords: theory, peace and conflict research, peace and conflict studies, theory verification, theory generation.

Introduction

Science is a systematic method of investigating our environment to satisfy our curiosity—the need to know. "Science is not something one does; rather it is an approach towards doing things..." (Dane, 1990, p. 21) It is the process of searching for explanations, or for the causes of events. It is defined by its logic and method—the scientific method (Dane, 1990). In science, empirical (sensory perception- based) data are authoritative and are used to test scientific ideas (explanations or theories). Science aims to collect, describe and explain its data with the ultimate aim of predicting/controlling them. Therefore real-world data and theory, especially, explanatory theory has vital roles in the scientific method and enterprise. The scientific approach to knowledge accumulation therefore involves collecting data about phenomena we are interested in, building theories to explain the data we have collected, and then testing those theories against new data. In other words, using logically adequate framework of techniques, that is, an appropriate methodology, empirical data are collected to evaluate the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive power of theory. This is how scientific knowledge grows—by disproving its theories; as scientific theories cannot be proved (Popper, 1959 cited in Punch, 1998, p. 40; Dane 1990, p. 23). Even when our predictions from a theory fit the facts, we have only failed to prove that the theory is false, that is, the theory "…is not not-true" (Dane, 1990, p. 23). In the scientific approach, therefore, it is irrelevant whether data come before theory or theory comes before data. The essential thing is that both be present (Punch, 1998; Akinyoade, 2012). This is being scientific in our approach to acquiring knowledge about our world. This is science.

Science has two realms—the natural and social sciences. The natural science applies the scientific method to investigating, understanding and explaining natural events and relationships within the physical world. Social science is the scientific study of human behavior. The Social Sciences are the disciplines that apply the scientific method to the study of social phenomena. They employ the scientific method to investigate, and seek to understand and explain human behaviors within the social context—social relations, social groups, and social institutions. It aims to build explanatory theories about human behavior. These theories are based on and are tested against real-world (empirical) data. Consequently, from the above, empirical data and theory are the two essential parts to science.

Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) is an applied Social Science. It therefore shares some assumptions with all scientific endeavors, some with other social sciences, and some with other applied sciences such as medical (health) studies, architecture, and engineering (Galtung, 1996). However, though relatively younger than older social science research area, PCR is becoming plagued by what Alemika referred to as the growing "…estrangement of theoretical discussion in methodology…" (2002, p. 10) This disarticulation of methods and theories leads to "crude empiricism" in many social research in which case stated theories do not influence method—collection, analysis and interpretation. (Alemika, 2002) As a modest contribution to prevent this trend in PCR, this paper seeks to answer four questions. These include what is the nature of theories in PCR? What theories are available in PCR and how do we classify them? What role does theory play in PCR? What is theory verification research and theory generation research in PCR? These are answered in the four subsequent sections in the paper.

Theory in the Scientific Enterprise of Peace and Conflict Research (PCR)

Before examining the nature, place and role of theory in Peace and Conflict Research, it is important to delimit what constitute a PCR. To do this, there is need to situate PCR within PCS. According to Akinyoade (forthcoming), "…scholarship, research and practice in Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) focus on certain core issues, which define the ontology and from which epistemological, methodological and theoretical issues in the field flow." The most basic of these core issues are what peace is; the nature, causes, outbreak, and dynamics of conflict; and the means for resolving conflict; and building sustainable peace (McCandless, 2007a; Dupuy, 2010 in Akinyoade, forthcoming). Any investigation that applies the scientific method to the study of these phenomena therefore constitutes a Peace and Conflict Research (PCR). In other words, researchers in PCR investigate in order to understand, explain and predict the conditions for peace; the nature, causes, onset and dynamics of conflict; how to resolve conflict and build sustainable peace; amongst other things. Consequently, using appropriate methodologies, peace and conflict researchers gather empirical evidences (data) on the ontological presuppositions implied in these phenomena through any or a combination of the three ways of knowing (that is, the epistemology) proposed by Johan Galtung—empirical peace studies, critical peace studies and constructive peace studies (Galtung, 1996; Akinyoade, forthcoming). This describes the relationship of ontology, epistemology and methodology in PCR.

However, this relationship is incomplete without theory, which, as in other social sciences fields, links the philosophical foundations with empirical data. Theories are explanations of observed regularities (Bryman, 2004). A theory summarizes existing knowledge and provides guidelines for conducting research and interpreting new information. (Gelles & Levine, 1999) It is an organized body of assumptions that generates hypotheses and explains behaviors within a specific framework. Khan says, "[t]heories are constructed in order to explain, predict and master phenomena (e.g. relationships, events, or the behavior). In many instances we are constructing models of reality. A theory makes generalizations about observations and consists of an interrelated, coherent set of ideas and models." (N.D). Theories are dynamic, that is, they are continually tested, refined, and revised in the light of new empirical evidences (Spata, 2003). Every PCR stems from theory, either explicit or implicit. Implicit or informal theories refer to those assumptions a researcher has while explicit or formal theories refers to established theories. However, informal theories are usually related to at least one formal theory. According to Alemika (2002, p. 6), "…methodology provides the logical framework for testing (confirming/validating or refuting/falsifying) [or building] propositions about the existence of objects in itself and in relations to other objects" Thus methodology provides the framework for testing or building theory. Thus testing and building theories validates and completes the PCR business as a scientific enterprise.

Theories have elements, levels and serve some purposes in the scientific enterprise. Theories have three elements, namely, assumptions, concepts (and/or variables), and propositions. Theoretical Assumptions are untested explanations about phenomena of interest. They are the foundation of theory, that is, the underlying structure on which other elements of theory are built. (Gelles & Levine, 1999) Social concepts on the other hand are abstract words that represent or describe concrete phenomena. They are abstract ideas that identify similarities among otherwise diverse social phenomena. 'Social class' is an example of social concept that summarizes diverse and unrelated attributes as income level, occupation, education, lifestyle, residential address, and taste. Concepts in PCR include peace, conflict, violence, nonviolence, justice, and the likes. Scientific propositions are statements about the nature of a concept or about the relationship between two or more concepts. They act as the connecting framework holding other elements of theory together. (Gelles & Levine, 1999) These three elements must be identified in any theory. Breaking theories into its elements is helpful in learning about theories as it points the learner to what to look for to quickly acquaint herself

with the theory. Also, it helps in theory building as it furnishes the builder(s) with requisite 'materials' to put together in building the theory.

According to Gelles and Levine (1999), there are three levels of theory, which are hypothesis, theories of middle range, and theoretical orientations. Hypothesis is not a complete theory. It refers to concrete statements about relationships between variables that can be tested empirically Frustration-Aggression is sometimes referred to as a hypothesis. Theories of middle range, according to Gelles and Levine (1999, p. 67), are modest theories, limited in scope and generality, and close to empirical data. They are relatively easy to test and to revise, if need be. Merton's theory of relative deprivation is an example of middle range theory. Theoretical Orientations are broad, general theories that attempt to explain all or the most important aspect of social life (Gelles & Levine, 1999). Examples include Sociology theories of functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Theory is essentially an attempt to explain the phenomena being studied using terms more abstract than the terms use to describe the phenomena. Theory may be about what the phenomena is, its form of existence, and its relationships with other phenomena. Hence, theory is a tool for explaining reality. Theories serve a number of purposes in PCR. It links the philosophical foundations (ontology and epistemology) to empirical data. It is critical to explaining empirical data; a tool for explaining reality. In addition, it helps peace and conflict researchers to summarize and comprehend the facts (empirical evidences) gathered about phenomena. Facts are dumb without theory. In other words, facts must be fit into meaningful framework—theory. Also, theories highlight which elements of a phenomenon are relevant and important for study; hence, a scientific research must necessarily have a theory (ies) in addition to methodological issues. Alemika (2002, p. 9) summarizes the role of theory in research as including defining appropriate methods for a research problem; specifying the nature (type, scope, and level) of data required by a research problem; offering conceptual framework or scheme for collecting, organizing, analyzing and interpreting data; and predicting facts or outcomes (deterministic, causal or probabilistic).

Classifying Theories in Peace and Conflict Research

The scientific study of peace and conflict studies started after 1945 when the looming threat of nuclear weapon created an urgent need for it. Peace and Conflict Studies is unique in that

its issues have been considered and reflected upon within and outside the academia. Philosophers, religions and religious leaders, royalties, practitioners, policy makers have all engage these issues from time immemorial. Motivations to develop a 'science' of peace came because the various peace, socialist and liberal internationalist movements failed to prevent First World War (actually, the European War). Scientific study of peace was attempted in France, Germany, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, the US and other countries. (Dungen 1996, cit in Miall, Woodhouse, & Ramsbotham, 1999) However, most of these were isolated and individualistic efforts. However, before the clamor for scientific study of peace and conflict, scholars like Pitirim Sorokin (a Russian Professor of Sociology), Lewis Fry Richardson (an English man) and Philip Quincy Wright (an American Professor of Political Science and later of International Relations) have been gathering and analyzing empirical evidences that will later fall within the scope of PCS.

The implication of this for Peace and Conflict Studies/Research is that a number of theories developed in other academic fields to study its phenomena of interest have found their ways into mainstream PCS. From the field of labor management relations and organizational behavior, Follett's 'mutual gains' approach (in integrative bargaining); from Psychology, Frustration-Aggression theory by Dollard, et al. 1939, and Social psychology of group conflict by Lewin, 1948. Also from Political Science, Brinton's approach to the analysis of political revolution, 1938, later expanded by Dahrendorf (1957), Gurr (1970), and Tilly (1978); and from International Studies, Mitrany's (1943) functionalist approach to overcoming the win-lose dynamic inherent in the realist analyses of competitive interstate relations (Miall, Woodhouse, & Ramsbotham, 1999). Hence a list of available theories for PCR will, amongst others, include: Animal Behavior Theory; Instinct/Innate Theories of Aggression; Frustration/Aggression Theory; Social Identity Theory; Social Learning Theory; Deterrence Theory; Games Theory; Decision-Making Theory; Ethnic Conflict Theory; Social Conflict Theory; Enemy System Theory; Human Needs Theory; Protracted Social Conflict Theory; Political Economy Theory; Relative Deprivation Theory; Greed/Grievance Theory; Horizontal Inequality Theory[2]; Democratic Peace Theory; Liberal Peace Theory; Peace Education Theory; and Integrated Theories of Peace Education; Peace and Conflict Sensitivity Theory[3]; Conflict Resolution Theory; Just War Theory; People Power Theory.

[2] Still at the development stage
[3] Still at the development stage

We can classify or categorized these theories using the four core field definition issues namely, defining peace; nature, causes, onset and dynamics of conflict; conflict resolution; and building sustainable peace. Obviously from the list, much theory building effort has been devoted to causes, onset and dynamics of conflict (the first seventeen theories) than any other issue. The next five of the twenty-five theories are on the conditions for building peace and the last three are on conflict resolution. Just War Theory may be regarded as being relevant to causes and dynamics of conflict.

Causes of conflict theories in PCS/R have been categorized using two parameters—level of analyses (that is, agency) and structural and political economy. The agency parameter focuses on the psychological and the social. Theories in the agency situate causes of conflict at the level of individual or collective agency and are based on human behavior. It has two contending categories of theorizing conflict—the behaviorists and the classical. The behaviorists focus on micro, that is, individual level, examining the unconscious level to understand the unstated motivational factors. Conflict causes are traced to perceptions and misperceptions. This category of theories argue that aggressive behavior is innate, that is, biologically programed into the human species (Bangura & McCandless, 2007). The psychoanalytic dimension to this argument is that the human psychological need for differentiation between 'self' and 'other' is the foundation for prejudice and building block for enemies (e.g., Volkan 1988). However, some of the views held by the earlier theories in this category have been contested by the Seville Statement on Violence (1986) which declares that there is no scientific basis for considering human beings as innately condemned to violence. Micro or behavioral theories include such theories as the Animal Behavior Theory, Instinct or Innate Theories of Aggression (including Sigmund Freud's Death Theory), Dollard-Doob-Miller's Frustration-Aggression Theory, Tadjfel's Social Identity Theory, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The behaviorist school tries to establish whether humans possess either biological or psychological characteristics that would predispose them towards aggression and conflict and to explore the relationship between individual and its existence in its environment. Some of the most important assumptions of the behaviorist school are that the root causes of war lie in human nature and human behavior; and that there is an important relationship between intrapersonal conflict and conflict that pervades the external social order. They believe in the centrality of stimulus-response hypothesis. (Cunningham, 1998) The micro theories helped us to understand conflict better by putting complex situations into workable models that stand the test of

empirical analysis. They prove a useful asset in our attempt to impose some objectivity on specific situations (Cunningham, 1998).

Classical theories focus on macro level of analysis. The primary concern is to analyze group interactions at the conscious level (Cunningham, 1998). Therefore, while behavioral or micro theories examine the individual subconscious, classical or macro theories, on the other hand, focus on the interaction of groups, specifically on the conscious level. They are often occupied with the exercise of power and the use of force in intergroup relations. Classical theories are useful in explaining acts and events; they do not answer questions about subconscious motivational factors. The use and exercise of power is a central concept of macro theory of conflict. There are many forms of power—economic, political, military, and cultural. The classical theories argue that conflict is a process "…of group formation and differentiation—particularly the role that images, (mis)perceptions, stereotyping, and dehumanization play in decision-making—lead to violent conflict. This is a psycho-social perspective." (McCandless, 2007b, p. 95) Assumptions common to macro theories are that the roots of conflict stem from group competition and the pursuit of power and resources. According to Cunningham (1998), "[t]hese assumptions operate on conscious motivational factors in a material oriented environment. Classical theories observe group phenomenon for single events in order to study the problem in depth, and to determine the importance and relationships of many variables rather than using few variables for many cases. They usually employ historical or case study methodologies." Examples of macro theories are Karl Marx's Social Conflict Theory, Deterrence Theory, Decision Making Theories, Game Theories, and Ethnic Conflict Theory.

In spite of the progressive sophistication of micro and macro theories, they have been insufficient in explaining conflict in its complexities. A paradigm shift in conflict theory synthesizes both micro and macro theories. This has led to the emergence of such theories as the Relative Deprivation Theory, Enemy System Theory (EST), John Burton's Human Needs Theory (HNT) and Conflict Resolution Theory (CRT), Edward Azer's Protracted Social Conflict PSC, and more recent theories such as Collier and Hoeffler's Greed-Grievance Theory. These theories have attempted to understand and explain the onset, causes and dynamics of conflicts. The Structural and Political Economy traces the causes and conditions of conflict to the organization of society itself. Theories in this approach focus on "…the

general forces and dynamics at play" such as situations whereby skewed social structures favor some social groups over others in access to resources. The International Political Economy (IPE) and war economy theories are also in this category. The IPE argues that the contemporary global political and economic arrangements are cases of systemic conflict.

Theory Verification and Theory Generation in Peace and Conflict Research

Science aims to explain and not only to collect or describe its data. Hence, theory, especially, explanatory theory has a central role in science. Therefore, scientific knowledge production involves collecting empirical data about phenomena of interest, building theories to explain the data we have collected, and testing those theories against new data. This is the scientific method of accumulating knowledge about our world. Theory and empirical data therefore play central roles in scientific research. From the foregoing, scientific inquiries verify (test) or generate (build) theory. Theory-testing or theory verification research tests the scientific propositions of a particular theory (ies) (Punch, 1998). Traditionally, positivist (quantitative) research is usually theory-testing research with clearly defined theory (ies) prespecified before the empirical work of data collection. Theory verification research is useful in areas or fields where there are many unverified theories. Theory building or theory generation research, on the other hand, seeks to end with theory, "…developed systematically from the data we have collected." (Punch, 1998, p. 16) Qualitative research has typically been involved in theory generation. As Punch points out, while both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be used for both verification and generation, however, theory generation research is more likely to use the unstructured fieldwork techniques of qualitative approach. Theory verification research is useful in areas or fields where there are many unverified theories. Theory generation on the other hand is more suitable in areas or fields with scanty theories.

There is an on-going tension between testing/verifying and generating/building theory in social science research. Both tradition (positivism in the Social Sciences) and convention (prevalence of quantitative over qualitative research, rooted in the positivist tradition) favor the former over the latter. Hence theory verification researches are disproportionately prevalent over theory generation researches in the Social Sciences. To this end there have been repeated calls to build more theories to understand and explain contemporary social issues (Punch, 1999). The situation is the same in PCR. Very few theories have been

generated within the field of PCS. Hence the field of peace and conflict studies is still far behind older disciplines like Political Science, Sociology, International Studies/Relations, Psychology, among others in the number of available theories to make sense of its phenomena of interest. (Though as a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary field, many theories in other fields are useful in explaining the core field definition and distinctive issues of PCS.) This might have been somehow contingent on the relatively young status of the field. However, this does not augur well for the field given the realities of its phenomena of interest—the ever-so-dynamic contemporary conflicts, the challenges of nonviolent conflict transformation and of building sustainable peace. Therefore, in spite of the relatively young status of the field, the complexity and dynamism of its phenomena of interest require new theories to understand, explain, and predict the realities of these phenomena.

There is therefore the need for concerted effort to build theories to understand, explain, and predict contemporary peace and conflict issues. And more so on contemporary African conflicts. In Introduction: Research and Education Fundamental to Peace and Security, King and Sall contend that the field of peace and conflict studies is "…open to a spectrum of conceptualizations, hypotheses, and theories." (King & Sall, 2007, p. 8) They argue further the need for African peace scholars to develop "…endogenous and alternative theories, methodologies, and analyses forged in the crucible of the epistemological, social-political, cultural, and economic conditions of African realities." (University for Peace Africa Programme, 2007, p. 75) Punch (1998) suggests theory generation research over theory verification research in relatively new areas, fields or disciplines where explanatory theories are still scanty.

The need for theory building in PCS requires taking some deliberate steps in the curriculum and practice of PCR. This may mean including and giving PCR adequate status in the PCS curriculum in some instances. In other instances it may mean building the capacity of peace and conflict researchers through methodology trainings. This may include boot camps on peace and conflict research methodology. And yet in some other instances the deliberate steps may include changing the attitudes of peace and conflict researchers. This involves reducing hostility to, embracing and building our capacities in the qualitative methodology as the more friendly approach to theory building. Moreover, there may be need for conscientious effort to encourage theory building among African peace and conflict scholars.

Conclusion

Theory is a critical component in the scientific method. It links the philosophical foundations with empirical data, thus completing and validating an investigation as a scientific endeavor. Theoretical assumptions, concepts, and scientific propositions are the elements of theories. There are different levels of theories—hypothesis, theory of middle range and theoretical orientations, based on the stage of formation and applicability. As a multi- and transdisciplinary field, Peace and Conflict Studies enjoys the utility of theories from other fields in the social sciences. However the complex and dynamic nature of its phenomena of interest and their implications for human existence demands generation of new theories to understand, explain, and predict the contemporary challenges of nonviolent conflict transformation, human security and building sustainable peace. There is therefore the need for a paradigm shift in Peace and Conflict Research, especially in Africa, to generate/build new theories. There is need for conscientious effort to reverse the theory generation versus theory testing research tension in favour of the former. This may necessitate some changes in the Peace and Conflict Studies curriculum, capacity building, and change of attitude to encourage the teaching and adoption of appropriate methodology for theory building.

Bibliography

Akinyoade, D. (forthcoming). Ontology and Epistemology of Peace and Conflict Studies. *The Security Sector and Conflict Management in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Institute of African Studies.

Alemika, E. (2002). Epistemological Foundations of the Scientific Method. In L. Erinosho, I. Obasi, & A. Maduekwe (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (pp. 1-31). Abuja, Nigeria: UNESCO Abuja & Social Science Academy of Nigeria.

Asika, N. (1991). *Research Methodology in the Behavioural Sciences.* Ikeja: Longman Nigeria Plc.

Bangura, A. K., & McCandless, E. (2007). The State of Peace and Conflict Studies and Peace-building and Development. In E. McCandless, A. K. Bangura, M. E. King, & E. Sall (Eds.), *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology* (pp. 29-54). Addis Ababa: University for Peace Africa Programme.

Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods.* Oxford.

Cunningham, W. (1998). Theoretical Framework for Conflict Resolution. Auckland, North Island, New Zealand.

Dane, F. C. (1990). *Research Methods.* Belmont: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Dupuy, K. (2010, July 28). Introduction to Peace Research. Oslo, Norway.

Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means.* Oslo, Norway: International Peace Research Institute, Oslo.

Gelles, R. J., & Levine, A. (1999). *Sociology: An Introduction 6th ed.* USA: McGraw-Hill College.

Khan, R. (N.D). Developing the theoretical and conceptual framework.

King, M. E., & Sall, &. E. (2007). Introduction: Research and Education Fundamental to Peace and Security. In E. a. McCandless, *Peace Research for Africa: critical essays on methodologies* (pp. 9-28). Addis Ababa: University for Peace, Africa Programme.

McCandless, E. (2007). Peace and Conflict Studies: Origins, Defining Issues, Current Status. In E. M. Bangura, *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology* (pp. 40-46). Addis Ababa: University for Peace Africa.

McCandless, E. (2007a). Peace and Conflict Studies: Origins, Defining Issues, Current Status. In E. M. Bangura, *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology* (pp. 40-46). Addis Ababa: University for Peace Africa.

McCandless, E. (2007b). Synopses of Major Concepts. In E. McCandless, A. K. Bangura, M. E. King, & E. Sall, *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology* (pp. 83-109). Addis-Ababa: University for Peace.

Miall, H., Woodhouse, O., & Ramsbotham, T. (1999). *Contemporary Conflict Resolution.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Inc.

Neubeck, K. J., & Glasberg, D. S. (2005). *Sociology: Diversity, Conflict and Change.* New York: The McGraw- Hill Companies Inc.

Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to social research: quantitative and qualitative approaches.* London: Sage Publication Ltd.

Spata, A. V. (2003). *Research Methods: Science and Diversity .* New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

University for Peace Africa Programme. (2007). Guidelines for Policy and Practice-Relevant Research. In E. McCandless, A. K. Bangura, M. E. King, E. Sall, E. McCandless, A. K. Bangura, M. E. King, & E. Sall (Eds.), *Peace Research for Africa: Critical Essays on Methodology* (pp. 71-82). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Author.