

Towards Critical Theories of Conflict Analysis: What the “Critical Turn” in International Relations Can Teach Conflict Analysis

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Noting the inability of the international community to resolve or prevent the increase in intrastate-armed conflicts, this investigation attempts to motivate conflict analysts to question mainstream approaches in their field of study. They can do so by asking some of the same questions critical international relations theorists asked when the “critical turn” started to take shape in the early 1990s. This investigation documents the emergence of the critical turn in international relations and critically assesses the main approaches of conflict analysis to demonstrate how they are ill equipped in the task of explaining and resolving contemporary intrastate conflicts.

Keywords: Critical International Relations Theory, Conflict Analysis, Intrastate Armed Conflicts, and Theory-Making

1. INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have affected theoretical debates in the discipline of international relations (IR); giving a boost to realist views of world politics and downplaying liberal descriptions. Other critical theoretical frameworks in IR have also gained in strength as the main discourses have failed to explain why the attacks took place. Today, the debate between liberals and realists is still predominant, as it was in the founding of the discipline after the First World War in the early 1920s (Carr 1946). The challenge faced by IR theorists, however, is not the same. This debate has forced many theorists to rethink the effectiveness of practical tools of diplomacy, international economic management, and conflict analysis. The focus is not only on world politics, but also intrastate relations.

Since the 1990s, the United States and its allies have fueled the forces of globalization in hopes that nation-states around the world would reform themselves and integrate into the emerging world economy. Those states that decided to not integrate in the emerging world order, because they did not want to reform their societies according to capitalist or democratic standards, were treated with scorn, while others were labeled “rogue states.” As the world’s sole superpower, the United States achieved hegemony on the cheap. It used its military to keep rogue states in check and to end violent civil wars that were questioning the liberal ideals of the new global order. Its economic agents helped to deepen economic globalization, while international organizations would serve as mechanisms to work with other nation-states to structure world politics according to American interests (Barkawi and Laffey 1999).

After the September 11 attacks, the US has used realist-inspired strategies to protect its interests and to restructure the international system by transforming nation-states Washington deems to be a threat to US hegemony. Is this the most effective way to structure the international system? Should the US force its values on other people or should it help them build a society that is reflective of their needs and interests, regardless if these are or are not in line with US ideals? This investigation does not provide direct answers to these important questions, only indirect ones.

The preeminence of the US and its willingness to use its power to restructure global and intrastate events has called into question the effectiveness of conflict analysts' theories and practices. Conflict analysis (CA) has developed many theories to account for the existence of armed conflicts and to render ways for its prevention. As it will be seen below, CA, like other fields of IR, has been affected by the realist-liberal debate, resulting in different practices. What is surprising is that CA has not really been affected by the "critical turn" in IR. One explanation may be that CA practitioners are less interested in theoretical questions and more concerned with devising ways of resolving and preventing armed conflicts. While this emphasis on practical matters is one of CA's strongest traits, the danger is that CA strategies may not end conflicts by promoting win-win solutions or conditions of positive peace, but instead promote ideals and values closely aligned to the US, encouraging American hegemony over international and intrastate affairs.

Consequently, this investigation argues that researchers and practitioners of CA must be aware of the epistemological and ontological assertions that frame their worldviews and their strategies. In many ways, this investigation attempts to foster interlocution between critical theory, developed in IR, and CA research. This communication could encourage new theories and practices that may resolve conflicts and allow people in these situations build new social orders that represent their interests and needs, rather than promoting the hegemony of American values and interests. It is important to note that this investigation's main concern is a theoretical exercise that aims to influence the strategies of conflict analysts.

This investigation is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to identify the challenge that CA presently faces by arguing that the current threats to peace is found in the modern nature of political communities. Section two looks at the history of the "critical turn" in IR, presenting some of its main meta-theoretical questions and explaining how these questions have affected IR research. Section three critiques the CA's three main approaches, documenting their inability to transform political communities according to the ideals of positive peace.

2. THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The number of international wars has been decreasing since 1945. Kalevi Holsti's *The State, War, and the State of War* reveals that 77 percent of all wars from 1945 to 1996 were internal, while the rest were external conflicts between states (Holsti 1996: 21). In the post-Cold War era there has been such a sharp decrease in the number of international wars that researchers at the Swedish International Peace Research Institute claimed that international wars might be a thing of the past (Wallenstein and Sollenberg 1996). This does not mean that international wars will not erupt, as recent American-led military campaigns against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq show. However, this research indicates that intrastate wars will most likely increase at a higher rate than international ones. More importantly and as witnessed in Bosnia, East Timor, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, the challenge is not fighting international wars or intervening in intrastate conflict, but the transformation of these societies once the wars have come to an end.

For these reasons, this investigation addresses the challenges posed by intrastate violence and other instabilities that lead to civil war. Two questions are important: What are the factors fueling these intrastate wars? What can CA researchers do to resolve existing acts of

intrastate violence and prevent future outbreaks? This section answers the first of these questions. The answer to the second question takes shape in the following sections.

Francis Fukuyama's prediction of the spread of liberalism across the globe and the universalism it expounds has been countered by calls to ethno-national particularism, the rise of global terrorism, and the reinvigoration of Islamic fundamentalism. From his perspective, the acts of intrastate violence that are threatening the cohesion of states and the stability of different regions are expressions of peoples that are "still *in* history" (Sandole 1993: 276). Parts of the globe have moved past history by proclaiming its end and organizing their societies according to democratic and capitalist values, while other parts of the world are still caught in history in an attempt to gain control of their society through undemocratic means. Ironically, Fukuyama's claim that Hegel's dialectic was undone as capitalist and democratic principles won the Cold War has also incited a new dialectic. In a way, the forces of global integration have fueled social movements struggling for political fragmentation. For instance, media outlets such as television, newspapers, and the Internet have informed dissatisfied groups in one country of how other groups in other countries are transforming their social orders or creating their own nation-states.

What Fukuyama failed to comprehend is that it is not ideological struggles that inspire historical progression, but the *nature* of the political community (Holsti 1996: 16). Conflicts among groups result from antagonistic perspectives on the ideal way of organizing their political communities. While powerful groups have the ability of shaping how communities are organized, their permanence is dependent on the satisfaction of all groups within the established order. If this observation is accurate, it can be determined that the outbreak of war is an expression of one group's dissatisfaction with the established communal order. Seen in this way, war is related to the problem of social integration. Although Holsti's research is important for introducing this assertion into current discourses of IR, his conclusions raise a number of questions that challenge the relevance of his advocated practices to prevent warfare.

Holsti argues that intrastate wars erupt in the "weak states" of the developing world. It is important to mention that the weakness inherent in these states is related to the lack of legitimacy the institutions of the state hold in the eyes of the people or in certain sectors of society. Holsti (1996: 183), though, actually points out that an alternative to the state as social integrator could solve this problem, but then dismisses it by advocating the strengthening of the state and its institutions. Should the international community endorse past state-building and nation-building exercises to prevent intrastate wars or should the international community invest in new strategies to attain this through other means? The way Holsti's argument is constructed actually gives the state the role of finding ways of transforming political community. The potential of other social sectors (e.g. civil society) in the social integration of society is not fully taken into consideration in his analysis.

In *The Transformation of Political Community*, Andrew Linklater (1999: 2) argues that communities must be understood "as systems of inclusion and exclusion." Although Linklater does not admit to such, it is not difficult to argue that social conflicts result from excluded groups' attempts to alter society according to their needs, interests and values and the in-group's insistence of resisting these agents of social change. In many ways, this analysis corresponds to the Marxist approach. Linklater's critique of Marxism, and its inability of grasping how exclusion of classes is not the only force of history, distances him from this approach. In fact, Lenin's, as other Marxist-inspired political leaders, drive to

dominate the institutions of the state and use violence against established capitalist societies counters Linklater's theoretical and practical project.

The purpose of this investigation is to foster new practices that can usher the foundations of a "radically different social system" (Fisher 1997: 36) that expands its boundaries to include all social groups, and works to enable its citizens to freely achieve their human potential. Linklater's (1999: 5) work attempts to unearth "the necessary moral resources within existing social arrangements which political actors can harness for radical purposes." Though his investigation is inspired by this praxeology, Linklater fails to provide any practices to achieve this envisioned society. This deficiency has led some in the academic community to declare his project of engendering a new society, where the state is not the principal social unifier and where the boundaries of exclusion are destroyed, as mere fantasy (Schweller 1999).

Linklater's study is provocative and raises a number of questions, but can his social ideal become reality? If so, can the field of CA provide the missing link in Linklater's analysis? Or, should conflict analysts take Holsti's proposal of building the institutions of the state, even if this strategy hinders the creation of an inclusive, egalitarian political community? Even though Linklater's idealism is balanced by Holsti's pragmatism, answers to this dilemma must establish the foundations of an open society that allows its members to achieve their interests and needs, regardless of their heritage, beliefs or ethnicity through social structures that can secure stability. As will be seen below, many CA researchers and policymakers have decided to support stability over openness, arguing that institutions that stabilize society eventually lead to the long-term resolution of these conflicts. Will Bosnia, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Angola, and Cambodia, to mention some examples, be able to construct an inclusive society where the conflicts that have led to violence are eventually resolved? So far, little evidence supports this view.

Conflict analysis must attempt to provide a solution to this dilemma. It is therefore necessary to assess whether current theoretical and practical trends in conflict analysis are aimed at fulfilling this objective. If not, it is necessary to challenge this field of study and move it towards this task. Before conducting this analysis, it is important to first see how the critical turn in IR has affected research in the discipline and how some of its insights can be used to determine if the field of CA currently has the theoretical and practical tools to provide answers to this challenge to world politics.

3. THE CRITICAL TURN IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS RESEARCH

Robert Scher and Dragan Milanovic (1999) have argued for the coalescence of postmodern discourses with analysis and resolution of conflicts to engender a postmodern paradigm of CA. Their challenge to the main paradigms of the field is not the first. Vivienne Jabri, Mark Hoffman, Beth Fetherston, and Caroline Nordstrom are part of a new wave of young scholars that wish to "interface traditional conflict resolution approaches with critical social theory" (Miall et al. 1999: 58). It is important to add that most of these researchers have been influenced by the post-positivist debates in IR and the rise of the critical approach to IR. In an attempt to provide new insights for CA research and practice, it is necessary to consider if a critical IR approach is useful in this endeavor.

Influenced by Richard Ashley's (1981; 1986) critique of International Relations reliance on structural realism and by Antonio Gramsci's brand of critical theory, Robert Cox's (1981,

reprinted 1996) research argues that: "Theory is for someone and for some purpose." It is not conceived in a social or political vacuum. A theory can react to a social problem by supporting the eradication of this problem and preserving the established order, or it can be directed towards reflexive objectives. The first purpose is consistent with what he calls the problem-solving approach. The second purpose represents a critical approach, which has not received much attention in the social sciences. The former is interested in arresting all agents of social change and advancing the proposition that individuals live in an immutable world of power relations, while the latter searches the origins of established orders to engender subjective practices of social change (Cox 1996: 88-90). As seen above, the problem-solving approach is firmly grounded on positivism, while the critical approach is influenced by Marxism and by other counter-hegemonic discourses.

Cox's article, which was published in 1981, made a lasting impact on the discipline. A chink was exposed and the mainstream theoretical frameworks employed by IR research started to come under severe attack. Theorists were not only questioning the relevance of these frameworks, but were calling for the propagation of new theories that could lead to meaningful social change. Realism's influence was being challenged by Pluralism, Structuralism and by an engendering critical approach. As Michael Banks (1985) argued in the mid-1980s, the discipline was heading into a new theoretical debate, which he dubbed the inter-paradigm debate. The central question was the following: What theoretical framework is best suited to explain international order and to propose avenues of social change?

Many answers were provided, but none was as provocative as the one provided by Mark Hoffman in 1987. In an oft quoted, but controversial, article titled, "Critical Theory and the Inter-Paradigm Debate," Hoffman submitted the three major paradigms to an immanent critique and revealed that each of these paradigms could not offer a solution to international problems. Echoing Cox, Hoffman brought to light the significance of "Critical Theory," in constructing new "Critical Theories of International Relations." Hoffman (1987: 244) boldly concluded this essay by stating that: "Critical Theory represents the next stage in the development of International Relations theory."

Hoffman's charge reverberated through the discipline as a critical approach to IR began to take shape. A year after Hoffman's article was published, Robert Keohane, President of the International Studies Association, recognized "the work of interpretative theorists, such as Hayward Alker, Richard Ashley, Friedrich Kratochwil, John Ruggie, and Robert Cox, [as] a clear alternative to the mainstream positive inspired approach to the study of International Relations in general, and international institutions in particular" (Neufeld 1995: 86-87). Keohane argued that these theories ascribed to what he termed as the reflective approach, which approximates Cox's critical approach. The rise of this approach and its recognition led Linklater, in 1990, to argue that Hoffman's conclusion materialized the "critical turn" that was taking place. This is not to say that a critical approach is currently at the center of the discipline. More than a decade has past since Hoffman's words and Linklater's descriptions. If anything, the critical approach, while influential in many ways, still remains at the discipline's margins.

Why has the critical approach not played a more decisive role in the discipline? The answer to this question was partially provided in the same essay that recognized the growing influence of this approach. At the conclusion of this essay, Keohane (1988: 392, *Emphases mine*) maintained:

Indeed, the greatness weakness of the reflective school lies not in deficiencies in their critical arguments but in lack of a clear reflective research program that could be employed

by students of world politics. Waltzian neorealism has so research program; so does the neoliberal institutionalism, which has focused on the evolution and impact of international regimes. Until the reflective scholars or others sympathetic to their arguments have delineated such a research program and shown in a particular studies that it can illuminate important issues in world politics, *they will remain on the margins, largely invisible to the preponderance of empirical researchers*, most of whom explicitly accept one or another version of rationalistic premises.

While some of these criticisms have been put to rest by recent research that connects theory with practice,¹ critical IR theorists throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s have had difficulties translating their theoretical insights into strategies that promote meaningful social change.

The theoretical potentials of the critical approach can be grasped by comparing it with the positivist problem-solving approach. There are three crucial differences that distinguish one approach from the other. First, positivism's insistence on the strict use of the scientific method and its reliance in the object/subject dichotomy to construct value-free, impartial judgments is ignored by the critical approach (Linklater 1996: 281). In fact, the construction of critical theory starts with a researcher's inclination to conceive a framework of action that ascribes to a normative or morally supported end. Second, critical theory "does not take institutions and social power relations for granted, but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the processes of changing" (Cox 1996: 89). To this extent, critical theory perceives all social structures as mutable. It pretends to understand how different historical forces have influenced the construction of social reality and how these forces inspire or inhibit the transformation of structures.

Third, critical theory is opposed to the separation of reality into different spheres of activity (e.g. Waltz's (1954) level of analysis). It attempts to analyze the relation of all interrelated parts and understand how these influence the progression of social events. Hence, critical theory tends to favor multidisciplinary research techniques (Kellner 1990: 22-50). It is important to mention that while critical theory criticizes positivism, it does employ empirical research to substantiate its proposition. "It is in this spirit," as Thomas McCarthy's (1993: 127) study on Max Horkheimer's critical project notes, "that Horkheimer, in his inaugural lecture as the director of the [Institute for Social Research], characterized critical theory as an 'ongoing dialectical interpenetration' of philosophy and empirical research, a form of "philosophical oriented social inquiry." Commenting on Horkheimer's understanding of critical theory and following McCarthy's observations, Linklater (1996: 283) argues that,

For Horkheimer critical theory was contrasted with traditional theory or positivism which sought to explain social laws and regularities. Critical theory regards the analysis of social regularities as useful for understanding the constraints upon political change, but it transcends positivism by analysing logics which may bring about the transformation of social systems. To illustrate, whereas neo-realism aims to account for the reproduction of the system of states critical theory endeavours to highlight the existence of countervailing tendencies which are invariably present within all social and political structures.

¹ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this observation. He or she pointed out Stephen Gill's and Mark Rupert's books are clear examples where critical IR theorists working in the field of international political economy have been able to translate critical theory's insights into practice.

Building on these observations, it can be said that the critical approach's objective is not geared toward technically managing the problems of society, but to searching for ways that transform society and instituting new social arrangements that meet the needs and interest of its individuals. Thus, the critical approach is a vehicle that can be used to transform the nature of political communities. It strives to use its theoretical descriptions to create practical means to empower the excluded social groupings, so they can engender a more just society that is not based on exclusionary boundaries.

As seen above, the most prominent challenge to the critical approach has been its difficulty to connect its theory with practice. In some ways, the problem stems from the fact that the critical approach is inconsistent. The word 'critical' serves as a label that encompasses different critical theoretical frameworks. At least five critical theoretical frameworks can be identified: (1) Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, (2) Frankfurt School Critical Theory, (3) Habermasian critical theory, (4) postmodernism and (5) feminism. While all of these theories aim at transforming political communities to create systems of inclusion and breaking with tendencies to erect structures of oppression, alienation, and exclusion, they do so through different means. This plurality obscures the potential and practicality of the whole approach. While it is important to understand the work being conducted in these critical frameworks, it is impossible to delineate the main characteristics of each in this investigation. What is important is to start a discourse that highlights the significance and untapped potential in the construction of these theories. Building on critical IR theories' meta-theoretical observations, the next section examines CA's main theories and practices.

4. CRITICALLY ASSESSING THE FIELD OF CONFLICT ANALYSIS

The field of CA, which is also known as conflict resolution in some academic circles, dates to the late 1950s, with the founding of the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Conflict Resolution and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. This field has spread to other research centers and sparked the creation of many concepts, terms, theories and practices, but there exists much confusion inherent in this study (Kriesberg 1997: 52). Most of this confusion can be related to CA's emphasis on, what Marc Howard Ross (2000: 1003) calls, "theories of practice." Conflict analysts put a heavier premium on practical matters, rather than on theoretical rigor. In fact, in a recent essay Daniel Druckman and Paul Stern (2000) argue that conflict analysts should rely more on theory construction than on "theories of practice" because post-Cold War conflicts are being affected by other variables that were not influential during the Cold War.

A closer examination of this field of study reveals a large array of theories, methodologies, strategies and objectives. Building on Scimecca's (1993a) review of the field, we can identify three types of approaches to conflict analysis: conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict resolution. Each of these is not only informed by different epistemologies and ontologies, but also by each approach's desired objective.

Conflict management, as Scimecca (1993a: 392) states, "assumes that conflict is an organizational problem that can be managed by changing the conditions *within* social institutions" (Emphasis mine). The emphasis is not to transform social structures, but to search for ways to accommodate the interests of displeased groups and individuals by allowing them more access to political and economic structures. Conflict settlement is usually aimed at suppressing the existence of conflict via coercion or the threat of force. This

type of conflict intervention is related to the imposition of a reality that might be inconsistent with that of contending parties. Like conflict management, conflict settlement is geared toward preserving a society's structures of power, not transforming them. In this way, these two activities are informed by strategic concerns of those that have a vested interest in the way society is organized. The objective is the maintenance of the *status quo* against the will of those that are directly affected by the established social order.

Although both conflict intervention strategies are similar in their purposes, they differ in their practices. While both work through the established legal order, conflict management advocates ending conflict through public policy, while the other underscores using legal procedures, backed by the threat of force and imprisonment, to settle conflicts. Karl Marx once argued that his vision of socialism would be ushered by contradictions inherent in the capitalist project. Accordingly, Marx's historical materialism argued that capitalism would degenerate into a destructive class conflict that would unite the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The establishment of a socialist system that reflects the values, interests and needs of the proletariats would be actualized once the masses overthrow the bourgeoisie and its capitalist order. Why did socialism not materialize, at least in Western Europe? Part of this answer lies in bourgeoisie's ability of *managing* class conflict. The bourgeoisie's introduction of legislation to protect worker's rights, to extend welfare benefits and voting rights, to name a few examples, decreased the levels of dissatisfaction in the lower classes and enabled the bourgeoisie to maintain their economic and political power. In essence, the state, which was controlled by the bourgeoisie, managed the conflict by fostering a culture of conformity. Rather than ushering radical social change, this approach advocates the attainment of stability by instituting modest reforms to keep the dissatisfied group content with the established social order.²

A conflict settlement strategy does not necessarily advocate stability, but order. This strategy, as said before, works to suppress the articulation of social conflicts by instituting a social system that only represents the needs, values, and interests of those in power. Social groups that are displeased with the way society is organized will attempt to change the system by challenging the power structures embodied in the institution of the state. This challenge might be confronted via legal means, but the attempt of those in power to repress society's dissatisfied voices impels groups to employ other means to contest the power of the state and advocate social change. Imprisonment of dissenters, public treason trails, public executions, and the sudden abduction of people are instruments used to instill fear in the citizenry and make sure that they obey the laws of the established social order. It is important to mention that these are probably the most severe instruments the state has at its disposal. Less extreme instruments can certainly be employed by the state, such as the use of police brutality, unfair trails, the withholding of social services that might advance the situation of the dissatisfied, the destruction of cultural values, and so forth. The ultimate aim is to secure the immutability of the social order through physical and non-physical coercion.

It is important to highlight how conflict settlement and conflict management strategies are corroborated by the tenets of political realism and positivism. Niccolo Machiavelli's "The Prince" introduces the foundation of realist thinking in the beginning of the Renaissance. In its pages, he advises a ruler on how to successfully run society. His realism is reflected in the section of the book that answers the following dilemma: "Of Cruelty and

² This observation is based on Popper's (1971: 154-155) analysis on the reasons why Marx's proletariat revolution did not materialize in the United Kingdom.

Clemency, and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved or Feared.” His counsel to the prince asserts that (1996: 182-183):

... one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting. For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours; they offer you their blood, their goods, their life, and their children... when the necessity is remote; but when it approaches, they revolt. And the prince who has relied solely on their words, without making other preparations, is ruined; for the friendship which is gained by purchase and not through grandeur and nobility of spirit is bought but not secure, and at a pinch is not to be expended in your service. And men have less scruple in offending one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread punishment which never fails.

Inscribed in this quote is a dual strategy of political organization. Either the prince achieves order through fear or love. The former ascribes to a strategy of conflict settlement as described above, while the latter approximates a strategy of conflict management. It is important to note that Machiavelli's work demonstrates the decision of employing one of these strategies is dependent on the prince's interest of maintaining political power at the expense of other social sectors that want the same power. Thus, the prince's *strategic* concerns motivate him to decide on one of these practices.

The influence of positivism on these two types of conflict intervention strategies is also related to the work of Auguste Comte, which was conducted in the mid-nineteenth century. The growing social problems of his time and the challenges these posed on established social orders impelled him to conceive of a science for society. Comte argues that the study of society should mirror that of nature in order to solve society's problems. He believes that every discipline of knowledge develops through three different stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific. The third, and highest, scientific phase, renders “positive” knowledge. A positivist approach “yield[s] a methodologically unified conception of science which could provide true, objective knowledge, in the form of casual laws of phenomena, derived from observation” (Neufeld 1995: 24). Hence, he believes that the purpose of a social science is not to demonstrate why things occur, but to describe and “generalize about how they happen – to provide, that is, an instrument of control rather than knowledge of ultimate reality” (Jones 1990: 202). This belief directed Comte to argue for the construction of an administratively controlled society managed by an elite of educated people who work to better material conditions for the rest of the citizenry.

This realism sums up the overall dilemma of the positivist project. Although Comte's interests are probably influenced by his desire to provide some relief to those affected by the capitalist project, positivism transforms the state into society's technical apparatus and homogenizes all controlling social processes. Because positivism argues that the role of science is to merely describe facts and make generalizations concerning these facts, the observer's experience has to conform to these generalizations. Positivism then affirms “the externality and the objectivity of reality,” but it “never raises the question of how such a reality has come about” (Keyman 1997: 96). The historical past is therefore not taken into consideration and social structures are taken for granted. The danger, as David Rasmussen (1996: 18) expresses, is that “theory conforms to the ideas of the researcher and not to experience itself.” Thus, leading to what George Luckás calls “reification” or “the process

through which human beings are turned into things, and thing-like, objectified relationships and ideas come to dominate human life..." (Kellner 1990: 10) Luckás demonstrates that the transformation of oppressive social orders is not the purpose of the positivist project. Instead, positivism aims at constructing theories and strategies that enable the reproduction of social structures and hamper any agents of radical change. The danger as, Scimecca (1993b: 219) argues, is that the conflict analyst becomes an agent of social control.

In essence, these two forms of conflict intervention surrender the possibility of constructing a society that advances a shared sense of justice by claiming order or stability as necessary elements for the existence of a viable political community. The continuity of society's established power structure is stressed and not on its alteration. The problem with these two strategies is their inability to solve social conflicts. There is a high chance that these will result in degenerative acts of political violence. Once society's leadership thwarts any agents of social change, the social situation becomes exposed to crises that question the legitimacy of society's power structures. One option is to regain control via force, but this often means that the state has to surrender all claims of legitimacy. Another possible option is to permit some social change, by satisfying a limited amount of needs and interests in exchange for the cooperation of displeased social sectors. Both conflict intervention strategies only secure a false sense of peace or, what Johan Galtung (1996: 31-33) terms, a negative peace – a condition where direct violence is non-existence, but cultural and structural forms of violence are still practiced.

Different from these two conflict intervention strategies, conflict resolution concludes that the transformation of society is the only path of attaining positive peace. Positive peace, Galtung argues, is the absence of direct, structural and cultural forms of violence. Direct violence is defined as any type of intended physical harm conducted by one person or group against another person or group (Galtung 1996: 31). Structural violence, as George Kent (1993: 382) observes, is a "harm imposed by some people on others indirectly, through the social system, as they [political and economic social leaders] pursue their preferences." Finally, cultural violence is understood to be the belief system that is constructed in society to legitimate or rationalize these acts of violence.³ Conflict resolution does not attempt to settle or manage conflicts, but calls for processes of social and attitudinal transformations.

Building on the work of John Burton and Galtung's vision of a positive peace, conflict resolution attempts to usher a social condition where all members of society, regardless of their ethnic lineage or their economic standing, can satisfy their needs and interests. Using the interactive problem-solving workshop as their preferred instrument of conflict intervention, conflict resolution supporters attempt to bring leaders of contending groups together in an informal setting so they can address conflicting issues. The purpose of these workshops, as Herbert Kelman (1996: 501) avers, is to "enable the parties to explore each other's perspective, and through a joint process of creative problem-solving, to generate new ideas for mutually satisfactory solutions to their conflict." As Richard Rubenstein's (1993: 155-156) research shows, the significance of these workshops is their influence on public policy processes and new changes in the constitution of society's structures.

³ Miall, Ramsbothan and Woodhouse (1999: 15) give a good example that highlight the differences between these three forms of violence by explaining that murdered children is a form of direct violence, while the statement "children die through poverty" is related to structural violence. Cultural violence is understood as any process that "blinds us to [these acts of violence] or seeks to justify [them]."

Conflict resolution presents a critique of political realism and positivism. What philosophical tradition and methodology influences this form of conflict intervention? The answer to this question is unclear. The failure of positivism as an instrument to analyze and resolve identity-based conflicts was revealed by Michael Nicholson, a supporter of this methodology, in his 1991 essay "Negotiation, Agreement and Conflict Resolution: The Role of Rational Approaches and their Criticism." Though it seems that he discredits positivism and its use of rational choice theory to explain the dynamics of social conflicts, Nicholson concludes his essay by calling the academic community to find ways of explaining the irrationalities of identity-based conflicts through positivism. In this sense, Nicholson points to the problems with this research approach, but he does not discard its potential to construct better research techniques that advance the positivist project in the unfolding post-Cold War world.

Nicholson's essay does, nonetheless, demonstrate positivism's inherent flaws and provides conflict resolution some credibility. In a way, Burton (1997) supports Nicholson's findings and advocates a "holistic approach" that calls into question conflict settlement's and conflict management's reliance on positivism and realism. As seen above, Burton (1997: 20-21) argues that part of the problem with this approach is that it assumes *the person is wholly malleable, [as] the whole person has not been the subject of social studies*. The separation of behavioral aspects, which occurred when knowledge was divided into disciplines at the end of the last century, established behavioral constructs, which were designed to make possible accurate prediction, quantification, and 'scientific' analysis, *far removed from reality* (Both emphases are mine).

By definition, each discipline's interest to specialize in one area of study "must ignore complex human dimensions" (Burton 1997: 21). Thus, Burton's holistic approach supports a multidisciplinary project that can account for all aspects of human behavior and, simultaneously, explains how social realities (e.g. the organization of society) influence individual and group behavior in social settings. The first task of this project is geared at understanding the ontological needs that motivate human behavior, while the other tries to understand how social structures can either hamper or promote the satisfaction of these needs. Two points are worth mentioning about this research project. First, Burton suggests that social conflicts are a combination of subjective (e.g. non-material factors) and objective (e.g. material determinants) elements. Positivism's insistence on studying the objective elements and ignoring the subjective ones suppresses the conflict

Second, guided by Abraham Maslow's (1954) psychological theories on human motivation and satisfaction of basic human needs and Paul Sites' (1973) sociological theories, Burton (1993) argues that human beings are motivated by their needs. Social systems that obstruct the satisfaction of these needs, forces individuals and groups to transform this oppressive system. Indeed, societies that are unwilling to alter their structures impels dissatisfied individuals or groups to express their frustration violently. Moreover, political realism's assertion that conflict is an outcome of competing groups' control of social institutions is correct. Burton's alternative to this approach is basically a strategy based on the interactive problem-solving workshop that resolves the conflict and constructs new social structures reflecting the needs of society's individuals. Social system legitimacy is based on the ability of fulfilling these needs. Societies that ignore the needs of their citizenry are faced with outbreaks of political violence that degenerate into civil war.

Influenced by a strong tradition of political idealism, Burton (1995) attempts to find ways of engendering a society that does not fall prey to destructive social conflicts. This is

reflected in his conception of *provention*, which attempts to engender a society based on an adequate explanation of conflict and its resolution and prevention through cooperative processes of social integration. The project of positivism is not completely ignored, as Burton places much effort to show these basic human needs and its relation to social conflict “as scientifically and objectively knowable” (Hoffman, 1987: 243). Conflict resolution, therefore, is not manipulation or controlling of human beings. It instead facilitates groups and individuals to build new social networks that increase political cooperation and promote social change according to their collective needs.

When compared to conflict management and conflict settlement, conflict resolution seems preferable. But, conflict resolution’s inability of translating its theories into practice has questioned the relevance of this approach to CA. Burton (1995: 127) has accepted this difficulty in 1995 when he stated: “One must conclude that there is now a tremendous challenge to the academic community to give lead toward less adversarial institutions nationally and internationally”. He expressed the same preoccupation in the conclusion of his 1997 book, *Violence Explained*. The problem with Burton’s conflict resolution approach, and this holds true for most of the strategies that build on this approach, is that it describes an ideal social condition without actually illustrating the means of achieving this conception in society. This is not to say that Burton and his colleagues have not constructed practical strategies of conflict resolution, as their interactive problem-solving workshops are proof of this task. It is important to notice that these problem-solving workshops have not been able to translate its outcomes in macro-sociological terms; they have for the most part not affected the way society is organized. In essence, conflict resolution theorists must address this problem, if they wish to revitalize their project and engender a society based on conflict prevention.

Conflict resolution is faced with other pressing difficulties. The first is its call to universalism. Burton argues that his theory is generic, applicable to any social conflict in any part of the world and that conflict resolution’s adherence to a problem-solving approach based on the satisfaction of ontological needs is “a priori, culture free or culture transcendent.” (Avruch and Black 1993: 131). Conflict resolution analysts, like the counterparts that practice conflict management and conflict settlement, argue that people with different cultural traditions have the same capacity to *reason*. So, another problem with this approach is its reliance on the Western-centric worldview (Salem 1993). Its omission of cultural variables, as a determinant of conflicts, must not only be questioned, but more research must also fill this gap, as many violent conflicts are fueled by negative attitudes ingrained in particular cultural perspectives.

Lastly, Burton’s insistence that conflicts are fueled by the frustration of ontological human needs and not by the frustration of an individual’s interests must be questioned. Burton (1993: 55) argues that the frustration of interests leads to disputes and conflict management and conflict settlement procedures can only address disputes. The separation of conflicts and disputes and interests are misnomers because a society that is not organized around the institutions of the state cannot be engendered. The existence of disputes necessitates the existence of the state apparatus. His research does not clarify whether the resolution of conflicts by way of the fulfillment of human needs will also cease the existence of disputes. This deficiency does not only create much confusion, but leads to doubt the practical relevance of conflict resolution’s project and the theoretical differences from conflict management and conflict settlement approaches, as described at the beginning of this section.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building on the second section's examination of the critical turn in IR, section three's critical assessment of CA's main approaches and practices reveals that while conflict resolution is more closely attuned to critical theory's normative ends, its ability to construct critical understandings of particular conflict situations is compromised by many weaknesses. In many ways, conflict resolution is influenced by liberal ideals and counters the realist-inspired conflict management and conflict settlement approaches. While conflict resolution may seem preferable to the other two approaches, its weaknesses do not guarantee that their practices will actually institute inclusive social orders. From a critical theoretical perspective, conflict resolution's call to universalism and its reliance on Western notions is perceived by many in the non-Western world as a threat to their cultures, needs and interests. From this perspective, conflict resolution has the potential of forcing people to accept a social order that is not consistent with their reality, rendering it as oppressive as conflict management and conflict settlement strategies.

Consequently, CA researchers must be aware of these problems if they wish to construct practical strategies that can usher the foundations of open and inclusive societies built on the ideals of positive peace. If not their research may not foster social change, but reproduce social orders that strengthen the position of powerful actors at the expense of weaker ones. Indeed, in the contemporary era, where power politics and realist strategies seem to be dominating discourses in international relations and practices in world politics, there is a need for new critical approaches to CA that place more emphasis on social theory and history. Where conflict analysts have invested much intellectual resource in understanding a conflict's dynamic, they have also been unable to explain conflict processes as specific expressions of a particular socio-historical period. This is exemplified by the criticisms leveled against Burton's theories, which most social scientists find as too underdeveloped (Fisher 1997: 36).

It is important to recognize that this investigation advocates a dialogue between the critical IR theories and conflict analysts' research and does not support any particular theory (e.g. post-structuralism, feminism, the Frankfurt School, etc.). Likewise, conflict analysts should use the theoretical framework that best suits their research aims. The importance of the "critical turn" in IR is not so much its ability to construct a research program that addresses problems in world politics but its capacity to raise pressing meta-theoretical questions that affects researchers' understanding of different social events. In many ways, critical theorists in IR have demonstrated that theory-making is not only an academic endeavor, but one that pertains to world politics. Theories are, thus, instruments of human praxis, which legitimate certain practices, while denouncing others. Hence, instituting conditions of positive peace as means to resolve and prevent intrastate conflict necessitates new theoretical frameworks that explain what factors have hindered such efforts. Once new explanations are provided, conflict analysts will be in a position to devise new strategies to establish conditions of positive peace.

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