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Contemporary Theories of Conflict and their Social and Political Implications

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Introduction: Objectives and General Issues

Africa's Great Lakes region has been known in the past four decades or so – as an area of violent conflict. An advanced research project on this region has to start with some reflections on theories of conflicts, as some parts of this region have been characterised by a devastating disease which has resulted in loss of human lives, degradation of the environment, pillage, banditry, rape of women and girls, and a general political instability of high magnitude. To explain what has happened, we need to build a good explanatory tool.

The beginning of wisdom is to be aware of one's limits of knowledge and be certain of one's areas of strength. For easy understanding, this chapter is divided into several sections. The first section describes the main objectives, clarifies the term 'contemporary' and raises general issues regarding the relevance or irrelevance of theories in this research project. The second section discusses the approaches used in the work; while the third, elaborates on theories of conflict, as well as their claims, assumptions and possible social and political implications. The study ends with some brief recommendations about these theories.

Let me start by saying that we cannot change all the phenomena around us or those things that are far from us – things we do not know about, or understand. We cannot explain social phenomena effectively without building some systematic and testable tools of explanations. Empiricism is central to building a critical theory.

The contemporary world system (or global system) has produced more conflicts because many of its malfunctioned infrastructures and institutions were built on neo-colonial values, practices related to trans-Atlantic slavery, outcomes

of European and American imperialist policies, post-colonial states' failures to decolonise, contradictions related to expansion of monopolistic capitalism, the claims associated with struggles toward multipolarity, consequences of intensification of illegal arms trafficking and arms race among nation-states in the name of national and regional security propositions. Thus, from the above perspective, the origin of conflict can be systemic.

More than 25 per cent of the populations in sub-Saharan Africa live in conflict-afflicted countries. For a variety of reasons and factors, various actors make more claims and grievances within their systems today than 50 or 60 years ago. Regardless of their origins and manifestations, grievances made by the nation-states, citizens, ethnic groups or communities imply the existence of an adversarial relationship, social and political tensions, and agencies of protests through which grievances are organised. Grievances are the most important components in the studies of conflict. Nota Bene, in this work, I use the expressions nation and state interchangeably.

There are many contemporary theories that explain the nature of disagreements, frictions, discomfort, tensions, political, religious, ideological and economic differences among social classes, gender, age groups, the states, and regional and international organisations. These theories explain the origins of conflicts, their causes and manifestations, their trajectories and their social, cultural and economic implications at the individual, group, country, regional and international levels. The location of the conflict culturally, sociologically, economically and politically through a theoretical analytical framework is likely to inform us how the conflict might be resolved. Thus, the nature of the explanations would provide knowledge and embody assumptions about how to proceed in changing a conflicting situation.

This chapter identifies and broadly examines elements of major theories that are used more specifically in the social sciences and humanities to explain how they deal with the origins of conflicts, their manifestations, both human and material resources, agencies and their ideological base, if any. The main questions about dealing with theories of conflicts are: (1) Why do conflicts occur? (2) How do they occur? (3) Who are their agents and what are their agencies? (4) How are they managed? (5) What resources are used to advance them? (6) What are their intended and non-intended consequences? Finally, (7) Can they be prevented both in the short as well as in the long run? In general, all theories of conflict address most of these questions though this may not be in order listed here.

It should also be emphasised that there are weak and strong theories of conflict. The 'weakness' and 'strength' of the theories depend very much on the schools of thought in which one is located. Weak theories are those that do not take seriously the context in its holistic manner. They do not pay enough attention to conditions that led to conflict. These theories are not sufficiently testable and not strongly applicable because they lack rigorous and systematic logic of explanation.

When theories are not capable of explaining what is being analysed, they become irrelevant.

Strong theories are relevant because they are functional. They not only take seriously the context, but also embody philosophical policy implications. These theories interrogate or cross-examine what is being studied in a systematic and consistent manner. Most theorists agree that theoretical knowledge is not an end in itself, but a starting point for actors to work their way through contemporary problems and, in the process, come to deeper forms of understanding (p. 54).

We should not explain things only for the sake of explaining them. Intellectualism should be avoided because it has epistemological limitations. Our explanations should have social purposes.

The main objectives of the theories are to: (1) Explain more effectively and systematically the world of humans (or the social world), the physical or economic world, and political world, the nature of the relationship between them, their actors, their events, their institutions, their histories and behaviours and their power base; (2) Acquire specific critical knowledge, both qualitative and quantitative, that is needed to understand what is being studied in specific and broad way; and (3) Produce a conceptualised direction of change or policy implications.

In short, with theories the intent is to know, to understand and to change. Theories are the tools for explaining the world out there but they are also tools for exploring ourselves. As human-made tools, theories are socially, historically and politically contextual. They are built and applied in a given social context but their scientific values and rules are produced by common agreements among scholars of different levels of. These common agreements are constantly challenged in the light of new discoveries and changing contexts. In other words, theories do not emerge from the blues nor are they applied out of whim. The context is as important as the values associated with theories.

By 'contemporary theories', I refer to theories or paradigms that either emerged or were consolidated and spread over between the end of the nineteenth century and now – the twenty-first century. That the time frame covers everything beginning from the colonisation of Africa, World War I, World War II, the post-War era, which includes Cold War era, the period of economic liberalization, the rise of multipartyism, and movements toward multipolarity. Contemporary also refers to what the majority of peoples of the world might remember as relatively recent.

All human habitats give rise to different kinds of conflicts. As revealed in this study, various types and different levels of conflict have characterised the world, particularly the Great Lakes region of Africa. In most cases, historically, a conflict, which might have started by or with a single cause or one factor, does have multi-layered explanations of its real origins and its real agents and agencies. For instance, the colonisation processes created multi-layered conflicts that touched on all the aspects of the African life. Within these processes, the land was appropriated or

new land tenures were imposed. New political systems were also established, and new social and collective relations were constructed. One of the primary sources of conflict relates to access, use and control of land. Others stem from access to, and control of, resources such as water, animal, plant and minerals.

In general, all human and social conflicts can alienate the individuals involved as well as the ethnic groups, larger societies and states from their own rules and established lifestyle. They might begin to question their set ways of life in a way that ultimately diminishes the social harmony of a given society.

Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between primary and *secondary types of* conflicts. *Primary types of conflicts* are those which relate to the fundamental or structural systems of individual, societal or state's functions. They are deeper than peripheral types of conflicts. For instance, they touch on the ontology of the systems, modes of societal organisations and governance; and they deal with individual social and political locations in a given society. *Secondary types of conflicts* address generally symptoms, behaviours, and atomistic individualistic claims. They might also be classified teleologically as instrumental. Thus, in a given social and political context, we have to pose the question of whether or not what we are observing historically or empirically as relations of conflict reflect primary or secondary types of conflict.

Elements of my Approaches

It is necessary that I clarify further where intellectually and philosophically I stand on. My approaches help to define and examine conflict, conflict resolution, peace and reconstruction within a historical framework. Humans embody the germ of the past and build the present on the past. But the past, the present, and the future each has its own specific distinctive moment, space, and time. The present should not sacrifice the past and vice-versa. From this perspective, a social progress agenda such as the one on peace, security and development, is perceived as being essentially a teleological and dialectically synthesised conscious effort. I use a historical-structuralist approach and its philosophical assumptions and claims with a dose of systems analysis as articulated by the advocates of the world system.

The way social classes, nation-states, and societies function in the world system is a result of the internal and external dynamics of their locations. But these locations are far from being historically fixed or static. The world is a system and an organic whole whose behaviours are conditioned by the actors' locations and how they come to be in the system. The actors and the subsystems do not act in the same way because their actions depend on their specific functions and attributes and their location within the system.

I consciously avoid intellectual extremism, historical determinism and conspiracy theory because they lack a good understanding of the forces of history. I interpret history as a changing phenomenon that is not predetermined

by any circumstances or forces. I build my arguments on historical-structuralist assumptions and in finding correlations between historical facts or causations/ correlations and structures of the African contemporary society. Historical structuralism raises the question of origins of these phenomena and the nature of the evolution of their structures. Within the structures of the African societies, I place more emphasis on the political institutions or the states and their relations to the Immanuel Wallenstein's world system (1974, 1980, and 1989). Although concrete illustrations or experiences are used to support and/or clarify my assumptions and explanations, this chapter is more of theoretical reflection upon which a broad framework of analysis is constructed. Furthermore, my interests in historical causation of social phenomena and critical examination of their structures are shaped by social constructivism. Adler (1997, 2002) and (Fearon and Wendt 2002) take the social world of agreed collective social values more seriously in also a non-material world. Ideas, ideals, identities and images are all socially constructed based on shared norms and beliefs systems.

One of the most important characteristics of the world system at the end of the twentieth century was the movement of states and people's struggles to redefine themselves. This redefinition has been taking different forms and shapes, some tragically like in the Balkans, many parts of Africa and the Middle East, and others more gradually and peacefully. The substance or the content of this redefinition and its intellectual quality depends on the dynamics of the local political configurations, how a given people and state have become part of the world system; the location of these actors in the international political economy; what they are bringing into the global market; who the actors are; and who their alliances are. This process of redefining themselves is facilitated by the means and forces of globalization.

The existing form of liberal globalisation, the state-centric approach of the classical realism to peace, security and construction is being challenged by multinationals or multilateral and transnational organisations. The global forces are forcing the state or the centralised authority to make accommodations in order to survive or to redefine the limits and the strength of its notion of sovereignty. Privatisation of the state is one of the characteristics of the world system that is diminishing the power of the state to engage its citizens productively both economically and politically.

To use Johan Galtung's expressions, I am interested in 'structure-conflict' and 'actor-conflict' as historical agencies in a changing world system (1958).

Theories of Conflicts

Why are people and states drawn into conflicts? In international relations we say that individuals and states that have nothing in common or do not expect to have anything in common are not likely to be drawn into major conflicts. I agree with

Pierre Bourdieu, Frantz Fanon, Claude Ake and other scholars who posit that theory must be rooted in a particular social experience. There are many theories that explain the causes of conflicts and their impact. Only selected theories are examined here.

As earlier indicated, factors that lead to conflict include rapid or slow growth in human population, unequal distribution of material resources, national power struggle, struggles between the haves and have-nots, gender and social inequality, and the struggle over communal values and orientation between the older and younger generations. other causes include exclusive political practices, inter-state and intra-state competition for power or a more visible positioning on the global scene, and the role of national interest and spheres of influence in the global political economy as well as the activities and needs of foreign powers.

Therefore, there is neither monolithic theory of conflict, nor is there any monolithic school of thought that explains the causes or effects of all conflicts in given context. However, within the current studies of international relations, there are seven major theories that explain why and how conflicts occur. They include (1) Classical/Neo-realism; (2) Liberalism/Neo-liberalism; (3) Marxism/ Neo-Marxism; (4) Feminism; (5) Constructivism; (6) Post-colonialism; and (7) Green Theory. Within each of these theories, there are varieties of interpretations or approaches used by social scientists depending on their disciplines. However, in an analytical work, it is always necessary to identify what is common among them all and what characteristics distinguish them. It is necessary to briefly provide a summary of each of the main characteristics of these theories with the focus on conflicts, their agencies and their consequences.

Classical Neo-realism.

The main actor in classical realism in world politics is the state or the nation-state. Its core objective is to preserve the state as an autonomous entity. That is why the classical theory is also called the state-centric theory. City-state, state, or nation-state claims its own rights in pursuing its own interest of order and stability without any fear from its neighbours. The identities of these actors are shaped by the way they pursue their interests. Political systems can be examined in terms of their principles of order, and the way they help shape the identities of actors and the discourse they use to frame their interests.

Politics is the expression of the same human drives and it is subject to the same pathologies. According to (Dunne, *et al,* 200:55) politics is all about power struggle and the struggle is not separable from social life itself. In the contemporary world, social norms, justice, and institutions are instruments of the pursuit of the national interests though the concept of the national interest remains socially, historically and intellectually controversial, especially when examined through the prism of other theories.

The conflict is inherent to the nature of the state. As developed throughout nineteenth and twentieth centuries, classical realism was characterised by the theory of balance of power, unilateral militarism, and a sharp distinction between domestic politics and international relations. Additionally, neo-realism, which developed after World War II, places an emphasis on alliance and deterrence. For neo-realists, therefore, the political clout of nations correlates closely with their economic power and their military might. The only source of power is capabilities (Kenneth Waltz 1979:153). Balance of power serves as deterrence against war. But it could also create or intensify tensions among nations. By and large, conflicts are likely to emerge when there are:

1. Lack of trust among nation-states;
2. Imbalance of power among nations or a powerful nation has lost resources and the capacity to maintain the balance of power; it could be that one power is increasing in power much faster than other powers in the same region or sub-region;
3. Over-balancing and under-balancing of power;
4. Lack of sufficient communication among nations;
5. Poorly defined national interests; and
6. The rise of modernisation or the shifting of power through its instruments.

Thus, international relations, as perceived and defined within the prism of the neo-classical realism, is all about conflict management.

Classical Liberalism

The father of liberalism in West, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, has defined it as a unified principle of liberty and equality. These two expressions have been interpreted differently in both economics and political thought depending on the political context and school of thought of interpreters and users. However, in contemporary world, there is no one single theory of classical liberalism. According to Time Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (2006:104), there are several variants of liberal theories such as actor-centred rationalist theory; actor-constructivist theory; rationalist democratic peace theory; and constructivist democratic peace theory. This chapter deals only with the one that is common to all, namely rationalism, individualism, and democracy.

Theorising about liberalism begins at the level of domestic politics. Domestic actors and structures matter as they can strongly influence the foreign-policy identities and interests of the state. Thus, domestic properties such as actors, institutions, practices are considered crucial explanatory variables, which also are called independent variables (2006, p. 90). At this level, people are defined as being essentially rational, ethical and moral creatures capable of controlling

their baser impulse. The unit of analysis is first at the individual level. Thus, human rationality and morality are the core elements in forming or reforming institutions in order to find solutions to social problems. The world or politics can be constructed without necessarily transiting from conflict and the human nature is not necessarily evil or bad.

The core elements of the liberal theory have two dimensions in explaining the world: (a) political level, which is about liberal democracy. It is about freedom of the individuals or emancipation of the individual from the forces of materialism of the world; and (b) it is about free market and free trade as articulated in the invisible hand thesis of Adam Smith, promoted and sustained by laissez-faire and freedom of goods and services (free trade). These two dimensions can be actualised at the domestic level. Their basic claim here is that domestic actors influence how states define their foreign policy interests and how they behave in international arena (Putnam 1988 and Milner 1997 and 1998).

Another dimension of liberal theory is its reflection on the bottom up of an analytical framework. It is about the dynamics of individual-societal relations. Rationalist and actor-centred liberal approaches theorise, in using a bottom-up perspective, about how policy interests are formulated and how attitudes and actions of national actors are shaped by domestic groupings as strategic rational actors.

It is assumed that there is no basic ideological distinction between domestic and foreign policies: one is supposed to be a continuation of the other. Contemporary liberal approaches in general place emphasis on communication, concrete benefits derivable from international relations or the international political economy or any intra-grouping relations. In democracies, citizens or communities do have incentives to maintain and advance their own interests.

It is assumed in these theories that most members of the communities are very likely to win from their bottom-up approaches to peace. The win-win theory is founded on the liberal principles of negotiations, cost-benefit analysis and rationalism, which is based on methodology that advances imperatives of individualism. And democratic peace is the main process through which communities or individuals can deal with real or potential conflict situation. As Dunne *et al.* indicate, in liberal republics, elected decision-makers are held responsible for all decisions (including foreign policy by their constituencies). Assuming that the citizens are cost – and risk – averse, the shadow of electoral sanctions would prevent republican governments from going to war too easily.'

The Neo-liberal approach, which has been dominating the world economy, was introduced at the end of World War II by the United States as part of the solutions to war. It was supposed to create the conditions that would sustain peace and support development. It also can be defined as the dominant political economic paradigm of our time which refers to the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much

as possible of social life in order to maximise their personal profit. The various roles the United States' government, the United States-based multinational corporations and banks, its military science and technology, its foreign policy, and modernisation school of thought after the end of World War II between the 1940s and 1970s were central to the defining of liberal globalisation. The principles and policies used for the reconstruction of Western Europe after World War II with the Marshall Plan (1947), private U.S. banks, the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the creation of the International Bank for Reconstruction (the World Bank), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT later the World Trade Organization/WTO), testify to the vital role that the United States has been playing in re-conceptualising globalisation. Moreover, the 'dollarisation' of the world market, followed by 'coca-colaisation' of the world has been playing an important role in this new globalisation in which the United States has been the major agent. Today, globalisation has reached even the domains of social and cultural aspects of individuals and communities such as arts, popular music and culture, and food as its processes have also been facilitated by the liberalisation of the world economy and financial resources.

The consequences of the implementation of these neo-liberal policies have created many social and political consequences. The question would be what are the real causes of these conflicts? Starting from early 1980s, the structural adjustments programmes (SAPs) in Africa were intended to deal with fiscal policy issues. The origins of the fiscal crisis were not seriously interrogated by the foreign donors but the symptoms were considered unacceptable. If and when the question of the origins of the crisis was examined it was dealt with technically, or it was associated with the behaviours of the regime types or political personalities involved instead of looking at it from structuralist perspective. It was believed that state's behaviour of spending money that they did not have and preventing corruption, would be possible with the imposition of classical austerity programmes.

Most of the adjustment programmes in Africa and South America, for instance, contain varying degrees of corrective policies focusing on devaluation of the currency, interest rates, reduction of government expenditures to line up with real resources, privatisation, liberalisation, and institutional reforms. Exchange rate policy is supposed to act to devalue currency so that those export commodities can become cheaper and more attractive to foreign buyers. Terms of trade are expected to be fully liberalised and to improve the movement of goods and fiscal policies by removing tax and tariff barriers. And interest rate policies are undertaken to encourage the population to save money and to tighten credit so that people borrow less. The government is encouraged to cut spending on subsidies and other services. In short, generally adjustment programmes (Lumumba-Kasongo 2005) include reforms to:

- Establish a market-determined exchange rate;
- Bring fiscal deficits under control;
- Liberalise trades;

And improve the financial sector, the efficiency of public enterprises and the coverage and quality of social services. The unit of analysis within liberal economics is the free market.

Privatisation of the state, the cutting of subsidies in several sectors of the economy, shrinking of the public sector, etc., all led to a rise in mass poverty and, consequently, popular protests. Concerning the sources of conflicts, one needs to seek them in the dysfunctionality of the free market. From a liberal market point of view, building of liberal institutions, the trust in the market values and those of individualism should be part of the package of solutions. At the political level, liberal democracy claims superiority as it puts individual rights at the centre of political discourse. It is assumed that electoral competition, the rule of law and legal procedures, periodic changing of the elected members of the administrations, individual rights, and so on emancipate people. The social location of the individuals does not matter much. The unit of analysis is the individual. Conflicts are, however, likely to occur:

1. When individuals are not allowed to participate in the political process through regular electoral procedures;
2. With dysfunctional liberal institutions;
3. When human and individual rights are disrespected.

All liberal/neoliberal theorists believe in agreements, treaties, and alliances and individual and institutional capabilities to achieve peace and security. Human nature is not ontologically bad. The principles of mutuality can be supported by win-win theories. However, the actors involved in social, economic and political reconstruction must believe in neoliberal democratic values, promote global interests and support collective security agenda or programme.

Marxism

Known also as a social conflict theory, Marxism started as a single theory in explaining the social relations of production in Western Europe by its father, Karl Marx. Over the decades, however, there have been many interpretations of Marxism both in industrial countries in the West and in the non-industrial Global South, which have produced a variety of explanations about Marxism. Marxism has influenced many thoughts in developing countries from Vietnam to Congo-Brazzaville, Mozambique, Angola, China and Cuba. It is not easy to measure effectively its level of influence. Most of radical leftist theories since the political decolonisation of erstwhile colonies and the rise of popular movements in various periods, including the most recent one at the end of Cold War, have

been influenced by some aspects of Marxist analytical perspectives, especially the theory of change, social class theory and proletarian revolution.

Marxism is, thus, an umbrella theory of radical leftist theories containing an ideology of organising new society, and it is also a progressive methodology. It has influenced other critical thoughts such as world system, *dependencia* theory, World Social Forum, African socialism, Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, critical theory, race theory, queer theory, feminist theory, especially in the West, and so on.

However, the core propositions of Marxism or Neo-Marxism deal with the contradictions of the capitalist system and capitalist conditions and how to change society. From the point of view Marxism, social conflict is inevitable within the evolution and the ethos of capitalism. And the location of the conflict is in the structure of the capitalist economy and its power base. It is in the ownership of means of production and social relations of production that one locates the origin of the social conflict. The process of labour control toward being the main objective of surplus accumulation leads to the alienation and social displacement. Marxism holds that the appropriation of labour and control over the means of production such as technologies, machinery and time by capitalists create dehumanization. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men (sic) that determines their existence, but their social existence determines their consciousness.

As compared to other theories, all social relations in Marxism are defined as economic relations. And a human being is defined essentially and mainly as an economic animal. Economic conditions determine the quality and the life of ideology, philosophy, culture, and psychology or all what is known as the superstructures. Thus, in Marxism, conflict is:

1. A social class phenomenon (social consciousness);
2. Materially defined;
3. The outcome of unequal wealth distribution (social inequality);
4. Not natural or organic.

To a large extent, the Marxist theory speaks of the capitalist contradictions and capitalist order or what others have called capitalist disorder. It is in the class struggle and its logic of organization of labor that the theory locates possible or potential solution. According to the theory, it is through the proletarian revolution that the social conflict can be addressed effectively. The unity of analysis in this theory then is the social class.

Feminist Theory

First, it must be established that there are several and diverse feminist theories. These include liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, and constructivist feminism. There are also regional and sub-regional feminisms such as Afro-centric feminism, African feminism, American feminism and European feminism.

However, there is a core of concerns and beliefs that unite a variety of feminist perspectives. Feminists of all stripes agree that traditional approaches and research have systematically excluded women and the issues of concern to them from public consciousness. For instance, the impact on women of such issues as war, sexual slavery, trade relations, migrations, have been neglected as compared to other issues directly concerning men. Most of feminists agree on the issue of equality between the sexes or equal rights. Feminist theorists also define a belief that women are entitled to enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. Thus, 'the feminist movement aims to bring changes that will end discriminatory practices and realise equal rights for women in *all* spheres of life' Steans, 1998:15). Therefore, gender, both as a social theory and an analytical category, has been central to feminist theory. Gender equality gives feminism its core identity and distinctiveness. Feminists also advocate political strategies for achieving equality with men.

Gender does not mean females, or women, or girls. It is about female-male relations. And even though gender is frequently used interchangeably with sex, it actually does not refer to what men and women are *biologically* or *naturally*, but to the *ideological* and *material* relations which exist between them. One can approach gender from the dynamic relations of male-female relations or from female-male perspectives. The generalized feminist approach to gender is being more advanced and accepted in various intellectual, social and political contexts because of the structure of female's centrality in most societies.

Feminists have argued that sex role and values are socially created and assigned. They also argue that the sexual division of labour follows this assignment. As Jill Steam states: 'Feminists pointed out rather than reflecting the personality traits of men and women, ideas about gender were used to justify unequal treatment and thus provided an important ideological justification for a specific form of social inequality." (1998:11). It should also be noted that, like feminism itself, gender has also been approached and examined by other schools of thought and theories already discussed in this chapter. However, the unit of analysis in the feminist theory is gender inequality.

Are females in Africa, for instance, treated by the institutions and social relations as different but unequal or should they be treated as different but equal? Some scholars have argued that equality does not mean the right of women to

practise the same trades and wear the same types of clothes as men. Equality is defined as the recognition of the value of the contributions of men and women. Obviously, if one group or class establishes the system of values and imposes it on the other, then there cannot be merely difference but also inequality in favour of the group with the decision-making power resides (Assie-Lumumba 1997:298).

There are different categories of gender relations such as relations between men and women and those between boys and girls; relations between women and women, and relations between girls and girls, and relations between men and men and boys and boys. These types of relations are determined by the systems of socialisation and institutionalisation in a given society. Other types of gender relations, include the relations of categories of women to social phenomena (whether to state, division of labour, education systems, economic relations, political systems or other) and the different relations of groups of men to those of same phenomena. Like other forms of relations, gender relations are structured by ideologies and beliefs, practices, property and resources access and ownership, legal codes and so on (Iman 1987:5).

It is easy to identify gender inequality in some societal or political traditions and values that have become routine for a long period of time. All these relations are socially constructed and, thus, not absolutely fixed in time and space.

The critique of the feminists have been that ontologically and practically, the issues related to gender analysis are either missing or are weak toward the understanding of the implications and consequences of gender inequality. The situation cannot be changed without a critical analysis of the nature of this inequality and the various types of conflict it creates. There is no better place than that of the Great Lakes region to include the gender analysis and feminist theories to study various dimensions of violence against women and girls during the existing conflict in the region.

Another theory that was developed during the Cold War and which has been expanding rapidly since then, especially in sociology and international relations and which has also come to define conflict in social and values terms, is *constructivism.*

One of the most important manifesting characteristics of the world system at the end of the twentieth century is the movement of states and people's struggles to redefine themselves through either old values or new values depending on the nature of the ethos of change that is being pursued.

Heavily influenced by the pragmatism of technology and the failures of other theories to develop new languages and models of analysis, constructivist theory deals with the claim that with the possibilities and options that the world has, there is a need to reconstruct new value systems away from the dangerous past. Adler (1997, 2002) and Fearon and Wendt (2002) also take the social world of agreed collective social values more seriously in a non-material world.

Social constructivism is a sociological concept that describes a reality as a social construction. As a theory, it analyses how social phenomena develop and how an individual makes meaning of knowledge received within a social context. Reality exists only when people agree to create it. Thus, reality is a socially constructed phenomenon.

As Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann argued in *The Social Construction of Reality*, all knowledge, including the most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interactions. They also claim that when people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding, their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. Since this common sense knowledge is negotiated by people, human typifications, significations and institutions come to be presented as part of an objective reality, particularly for future generations who were not involved in the original process of negotiation.

There is a general agreement (Adler 1997, 2002; Checkel 1998; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Wendt 1999) that the questioning and building of theoretical elements of constructivism are formed around the following templates:

1. A social reality does not fall from heaven;
2. Human agents construct and reproduce it through their daily practices;
3. Human agents do not exist independently from their social environment and its collectively shared systems of meanings;
4. Social structures and social agents are co-existential actors and re-enforce their collective rules in their social reproduction;
5. Collective norms and understandings define the basic 'rules of the game' in which they find themselves in their interactions.
6. All the shared values and beliefs should be agreed upon by all the members of the community.

In effect, a combination of structures of phenomena include those of the state and community, and collective practical values.

What are the sources of conflict in a community or among individuals?

1. Lack of respect for shared norms and rules of the game by individuals;
2. Inadequate participation of the individuals in the community's affairs;
3. Lack of understanding of the concept and practices related to collectiveness as compared to individualism.
4. Negative effects of liberal globalisation on individuals or communities.

The Green Theory

This is a relatively new theory in the social science disciplines. Within the dominant social paradigm (DSP), it translates to belief in science and technology,

values of the free market and those of individualism, environmental problems which were never key concerns during the Cold War era and even when many countries in developing world, including African countries, gained their nominal independence. It is only since early 1970s that autonomous departments or ministries/secretaries of environments with their own budgets were created within many governments, including those of industrial countries.

Modernisation school of thought, which has supported the assumptions of the DSP emphasised the importance of industrialisation, economic growth, and westernisation in development. However, it neglected the issues of environment until the period in which the symptoms of the environmental degradation started to appear and the rise of environmental activism. In Africa, for instance, the preoccupation of the advocates and supporters of modernization was mostly concentrated on the values and norms of state building, law and order, institutional stability and economic growth. It should be noted that the United Nations various conferences on the environment did play a central role in bringing the development of the green theory to public discourse as a powerful explanatory tool on the basis of the principles and values of natural and social sciences.

One of the problems that the world has been facing vis-à-vis the environment is that unlike military threats, for instance, which are deliberate and require an immediate response, environmental problems are typically unintended, diffuse, trans-boundary, operate over long time-scales, implicate a wide range of actors, and require painstaking negotiations and cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders. No wonder policy analysts describe them as 'wicked' problems because of their complexity, variability, irreducibility, and incidental character. Most environmental risks have crept up, as it were, on a rapidly modernising world as the unforeseen side- effects of otherwise acceptable practices (Dunne *et al:* 249).

The Green theory is part of the analytical tools of green development, which is a relatively new concern in the debates and policies on the environment. In many institutions of higher learning, the environment and environmental issues were taught in the departments of biological and physical sciences until recently. But what is the theory about? How does it define sources of the conflict? And how do the conflicts manifest themselves? What are their possible, potential and real impacts and implications socially, politically and economically? What are the major concerns about green theory?

Like the liberal or feminist theories, there is no single green theory. Rather, there are green theories. As a result, many movements in the late 1980s, with distinctive character and message of green social and political theory did emerge. The new movements, which started to consolidate their message and voices in 1990s projected the environment as an issue that was interrelated with peace, anti-nuclear campaigns, women, global warming, and economic growth. What

do the green theories explain? What is the foundation of their analysis, arguments and their policy? Finally, what social and political implications do they portend? These questions embody some of the issues that will engage our attention next.

In Europe and the United States, the new movements and emerging green parties articulated their positions based on new green politics, which include ecological responsibility, social justice, non-violence and grassroots democracy. These pillars have provided common platforms for all new green party formations around the world, including Africa, South America and Asia.

Green political theory is both normative and empirical. It challenges both liberalism and socialism for not advancing the causes of the environment; and its normative dimensions put an emphasis on the questions of social justice, rights, democracy, citizenship, the state and the environment. This political theory has also been critical to the capitalist political economy, the enlightenment legacies; ecological, social and psychological effects and cost of modernisation process. They have also questioned the anthropocentric nature of the humans with their instrumental reason used for the manipulation and domination of nature.

Green theories must explain in a systematic manner the sources of the conflict, which are:

1.   The contradictions and dysfunctionality of the capitalist economy;
2.   The activities of humans related to the domination of nature at all costs;
3.   Lack of systematic linkage between development and the environment;
4.   Constraints of the State's authority and sovereignty in addressing the environmental issues;
5.   Poverty, economic dualism (rural versus urban), and population growth without taking into account the finite limits of resources; and
6.   Weak or poor systems of governance.

 To address all these issues, a holistic perspective is needed. The relationship must be systematically understood. Hence, green theories emphasize the key tools of science, moral values, and political pragmatism.

Post-colonialism

How does one analyse post-colonialism? What tools, does it provide to analyse the world and how does it define conflict within the world of politics or the society at large?

Post-colonialism is a set of theories or an umbrella theory that seeks to explain the conditions and the structures of external domination and its local or national impact mostly on anthropology, education, literature, religion, history, politics, economics, gender studies, sociology, and human rights studies. As a generalised theory, it is among the most popular theories used in defining both the nature of

social conflict and its progress in historical terms. It is a complex theory that is intended to explain all the conditions, and societal and state structures related to a given situation after the colonial experience. It is a more comprehensive theory as it includes all the dimensions of human experiences and all the disciplines about learning process at a given time after the official period of colonisation. But it is often considered too general, too vague and with too many historically determined values. However, common intellectual and historical claims and their specificities are part of our inquiry.

It is a phenomenon that is found in all the former colonies. This umbrella theory in general deals with central questions of protests, decolonisation or self-determination and political reconstruction or rebuilding. These main items are the core expressions, which are intended to advance the building of a new state, new cultural identities, redefinition of new citizenry and new political territoriality and new international relations and in short new world politics.

Most of the revolutionary theories and political reforms in the former colonies have derived partly from post-colonialism. They bother on nationalism, self- determination, the struggle for independence, the means used to advance the struggle for independence and the outcome of such struggle. It also explains the agencies and the agents of such independence. This is so because they are historically, ideologically and politically founded broad theories. Decolonisation, which is the core element of post-colonialism, requires profound transformation of the former colonial conditions. Before various of the decolonisation processes can take place, the mindset of the former colonial elites must change as decolonisation is first of the mental magnitude, according to Fanon. In addition to the decolonisation of the mind, physical decolonisation of the space means to remake history according to the ambitions associated with independence.

Most theoreticians and advocates of post-colonialism agree about its meanings in the indigenous languages, including the implied nationalism and patriotism. It is a totalising theory built into the history of a critique of imperialism and its means of domination and its structures of oppression. It is an eclectic theory and yet it is the most clearly articulated theory in historical terms.

According to the theory, conflict emerges first on the identification of the characteristics of post-colonialism. The relationship between oppression and freedom is permanently conflicting. For instance, in Africa and many other former colonial regions, although the European colonial powers have physically left the colonized areas in most cases, but the basic structures of the states and the limits of the territoriality they created are still part of the independent states and other institutions they left behind. This situation creates not only institutional conflict but also latent instability within the existing dynamics of political institutions.

Post-colonialism also interrogates the relationship between former colonised countries and the current forms of globalisation. It examines the origins of

globalisation and the interests that its actors embody. When the interest of the states, those of the political elite and their relationship to liberal globalisation that promotes the interests of the former colonial powers through their multinational corporations are unequal, we have a scenario of national imbalance and conflict.

In short, the manifestations of the failures of decolonisation to achieve self-determination creates conflict, irrespective of whether or not there are currently former colonial powers' involvement in advancing their interest in a given country. We have to pose the question of how well or deep the states and the political leadership in the Great Lakes region have been decolonised.

Concluding Remarks

The most important aspect in this chapter is about identifying and discussing value of theories in social sciences. Thus, instead of repeating the importance of each theory of conflict that was developed separately or comparatively, I decided to focus on why in general theory matters in studying the conflict. The examination and classification of conflict in this chapter are based on an interdisciplinary and pluradisciplinary social science research premises, claims and propositions.

Although all the theories discussed in this chapter are interpreted and used differently in the disciplines of social sciences and the humanities, nevertheless, their logical bases, their deductive and inductive arguments and reasoning are similar. Thus, they can be used across the disciplines with a high degree of respectability and confidence. Also, the theoretical framework discussed here is one of the components of the scientific investigation in a research project; and other components being methodologies and the analysis. These two components should be enlightened by the researcher's theory or a theoretical analysis as it clarifies the assumptions related to core issues in a given work.

I concluded and recommended to the participants that this research project being a scientific social science work must be theoretically rigorous, systematic and consistent; and data or any information to be used should be credible; The final analysis should be socially relevant and the conclusion should be conclusive with clear and applicable policy implications.

And furthermore, I articulated that a qualitative theoretical analysis is not enough if it does not have any significant support of any empirical data base. The separation of perceptions from realities are emphasized in each of these theories. Built-in mental images (perceptions) are challenged, as they are distortions of realities.

Various types of statistics packages, theories, and principles can be used to complement, support, clarify and verify our hypotheses and our philosophical assumptions. Whether, it is structural equation model, factor analysis, multilevel models, cluster analysis, latent class analysis, item response theory, survey

methodology or survey sampling, we use them to also measure the quality of the analysis or to measure correlations among variables. Theories of conflict do not operate differently from the assumptions and theoretical imperatives discussed in this conclusion.

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