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## PEACEBUILDING AND THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORIES

**Abstract:** Despite its great theoretical and practical importance, peacebuilding has remained an undertheorized topic. The peacebuilding literature, confined to the single case studies and problem-oriented texts, has failed to develop theoretical frameworks that could enable systematic inquiry and critical examination of the contemporary peacebuilding. The authors analyse the main concepts developed by the conflict resolution theories that have inspired the conception of peacebuilding and shaped its practice. The outline of the theoretical origins of peacebuilding given in the paper recalls the key contributions of researchers in the field of conflict theory such as Johan Galtung's notion of structural violence, John Burton's human needs approach, the notion of protracted social conflict developed by Edward A. Azar and John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation approach. Born as an answer to the *Realpolitik* and the conflict management theories dominant in the Cold War period, the conflict resolution studies have signified radical shift in our understanding of the conflict. Their insights into the root-causes of conflict have linked the nature and the complexity of contemporary conflicts to the social, psychological and structural set-up of the societies and have constructed the ideal of sustainable peace. The common denominator of these theories - the transformation of conflict into peaceful, nonviolent process of social change - has moved the focus from the state security to a more normative vision of human security and stressed the importance of the social justice and universal human needs as the paths towards sustainable peace. Yet, the question remains whether the frameworks and methods developed by the conflict resolution theory can be consistently applied within the existing international order.

**Keywords:** *peacebuilding, conflict resolution theories, structural violence, root causes of conflict, basic human needs, protracted social conflict*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War the peacebuilding strategies have become the embodiment of a newly acquired understanding of human security. Thousands and thousands of military and civilian personnel have been sent to different corners of the globe to pave the way towards the "sustainable peace". Yet, notwithstanding both its theoretical and practical importance, peacebuilding has remained an under-theorized topic. In the last decade a

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growing body of literature on peacebuilding was published but mostly from the pen of the diplomats and military professionals and based on the single case study method. Having description as their primary goal, the main ambition of these studies typically was to examine the efficiency of different peacebuilding instruments in various conflict settings rather than to provide a scientific enquiry of this contemporary social phenomenon.

This has had direct consequences for the development of the peacebuilding practice. As Kenneth Bush notes, the main issue arising from the problem-orientated approaches to peacebuilding is that “they unavoidably exclude more than they include” and bring “inflationary and deflationary tendencies” in the way the practitioners and policymakers apply the label ‘peace-building’ to their initiatives” (Bush 2004:38). That situation has also resulted in the limited accumulation of knowledge the consequence of which was a tangible lack of theoretical frameworks within which the effectiveness of peace-building activities could be assessed.<sup>2</sup> Under the given circumstances, the human rights and democratization have become a self-explanatory justification of the more and more numerous peacebuilding missions.

The paper aims at tackling this problem through an overview of the main concepts necessary for understanding of theoretical origins of the contemporary peacebuilding. These concepts are drawn from the opus of four revolutionary researchers in the field of conflict theory: Johan Galtung, John Burton, Edward A. Azar and John Paul Lederach.

## 1.1. A short note on terminology

### 1.1.1. Peacebuilding

The paper uses the term peacebuilding to refer to a sum of strategies and actions undertaken at the end of civil war through deployment of military and civilian personnel with the aim to “identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace” (Boutros-Ghali 1992). This definition is based on the well know UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali Report from 1992, in which he presented a new classification of peace operations urged by the changes brought by the post-Cold War era. For the purpose of this study, the most important aspect of the given classification, which differentiates between peacekeeping,<sup>3</sup> peace enforcement<sup>4</sup> and the post-conflict peacebuilding, is its distinction between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Firstly, peacebuilding is seen as primarily *post-conflict activity*. As Keating and Knight note “[s]ince peacebuilding looks at ensuring a lasting peace, it is expected to involve much more than a cessation of hostilities” (Keating, Knight 2004:xliv). Secondly, the classification places an emphases on the non-security instruments of peacebuilding, such as the administration of elections, strengthening of the civil society, advancement of the systems for the human rights protection, training of judiciary and police, financial assistance and economic reforms, etc.<sup>5</sup>

2 Keneth Bush describes this lack of methods and instruments necessary for the systematic evaluation of the international peace-building activities as “[a]n unsettling characteristics of the proliferating self-described peace-building projects” (Bush 2004:40).

3 Boutros-Ghali defines peacekeeping as the deployment of lightly armed UN military personnel for non-enforcement tasks such as observation of cease-fire and control of the buffer zones between the hostile parties. The two main principles of traditional peacekeeping are mostly determined as: a) prohibition of use of force by peacekeepers, except in self-defence, and b) prohibition of any kind of political activity in the host state.

4 The newly designed missions with the personnel more heavily armed and authorized to use force for purposes other than self-defence, but which resembled traditional peacekeeping operations in many important aspect.

5 As different from the traditional peacekeeping the primary aim of which is to stop the hostilities. Of course, the au-

### 1.1.2. Conflict resolution theories

The conflict resolution theory is in this work used as an umbrella term that embraces different conflict theories which either have directly inspired the conception of peacebuilding or served as a basis for the further advancement of the peacebuilding practice. The authors use the term conflict resolution theory in distinction to the notion of conflict management, which in their view denotes the theoretical approach the main goal of which is to *manage* rather than to *resolve* the conflict. Namely, the conflict management is seen as the theoretical and practical approach to conflict dominant during the Cold War period, the focus of which was at the amelioration of conflict at the state level by the so-called “balance-of-power” instruments such as negotiation, tactical bargaining, coercive third-party intervention etc. This approach is historically older than most of the conflict resolution theories presented in this paper, and it is firmly linked to the state-centric framework of the Cold War system of international relations (Ramsbotham 2000; Richmond 2002; Woodhouse 2000).

However, for the purpose of clarity, it should be noted that certain scholars and most of the practitioners use the term “conflict management” to embrace all the conflict theories, including those that are here situated within the ambit of the conflict resolution theory. Their main argument is that the term “conflict management” is more in accordance with the nature of conflict as “a natural, normal and inevitable part of life” that will always characterise human society and hence can only be managed but never resolved (Parlevliet 2002). Despite the obvious value of this argumentation, the authors have opted for the term “conflict resolution”. In their view, only this term could fully reflect the essence of a humanistic orientated science – streaming towards unimaginable to widen the scope of imaginable.

## 2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORIES AS THE BASIS OF STRATEGIC PEACEBUILDING

Kenneth Boulding coined the term “conflict resolution” to name a study of resolving conflict (Richmond 2002:77). As noted above, in this paper the term “conflict resolution” will be used as a conceptual roof for several different theoretical approaches to conflict that were born as an answer to the “conflict management” theories and practice developed in the Cold War period. The common denominator for these theories is their objective – the transformation of conflict into peaceful, non-violent process of social change rather than the elimination of conflict. Their assumption that conflicts should be resolved rather than merely managed came as a logical consequence of the way in which their authors have perceived the conflict. As opposed to the conflict management, these so-called “second generation” conflict theories tried to embrace the root causes of conflict sought in the social, psychological and structural set up of the society. The research of Johan Galtung, in particular his notion of “structural violence”, was seminal for the further scientific inquiry of the roots of conflict.

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thors are aware of the fact that most of the UN missions deployed after 1990 have been multidimensional in nature and incorporating the different elements of the different types of peace strategies.

## 2.1. Johan Galtung: Structural Violence

Johan Galtung developed for his time a revolutionary model of conflict that was based on the peace research theory.<sup>6</sup> By introducing the term “structural violence”, he was the first to argue that violence does not have to be only a direct one, but can also be entrenched in the basic structures of the society. If injustice and repression are built into the fundamentals of a society this will sooner or later, claims Galtung, lead to the structural violence where individuals or groups are deprived of their access to the resources. The structural violence emerges “when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (Galtung 1969:168).

Galtung’s model of conflict presents conflict as a triangle, in the basis of which are the *structural causes of violence* (foundation of society) and its inner space is a net of incompatible goals, attitudes and behaviour. In the societies characterized by the structural inequalities, *incompatible goals* produce conflict of interest. *Attitudes* include emotive and cognitive elements, but also the objective aspects such as structural relationships and competing material interests. While under normal circumstances *behaviour* varies between the cooperation and coercion, in the violent conflict behaviour includes threats and destructive attacks.

Galtung sees conflict as a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behaviour are shifting constantly in the context of each other. In an asymmetric conflict,<sup>7</sup> he argues, conflict of interests is deeply entrenched in the parties’ relationship. This is further complicated with the different attitudes of the parties and the parties’ perceptions and misperceptions of itself and the other.

When parties’ interests come into collision and their relationship becomes oppressive they develop conflictual behaviour that leads to the escalation of conflict. Therefore, to resolve conflict, in Galtung’s view, involves both transforming the parties’ relationships and the clash of interests that both lay at its core. For that reason he believes that the peacebuilding, as opposed to the traditional peacekeeping and peacemaking, is the only possible way to deal with these structural causes of violence and to resolve the conflict (Galtung 1996:103-113).<sup>8</sup>

Another Galtung’s fundamental contribution to the conflict resolution theory is his concept of negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the situation characterized by the absence of direct violence but where structural violence exists, whereas positive peace encompasses the concept of human security and refers to the situation in which human beings are capable of developing fully their capacities (absence of structural violence).<sup>9</sup> This concept has been crucial for further development of the conflict theory because it has opened the door for a multilevel, interdisciplinary analysis of conflict.

Johan Galtung’s notion of “structural violence”, although originally developed in the peace research field, had formed a broad epistemological base for the subsequent developments

6 Peace research has been traditionally seen as a distinct field to the conflict resolution theories but it had, nonetheless, very important role in the development of many of the “conflict resolution” agendas (Richmond 2002:79).

7 The asymmetric conflict is a conflict where the conflicting parties are themselves asymmetrical with regards to the power and the access to the other resources decisive for the course of conflict. Structural violence is strongly related to this type of conflict.

8 This has inspired Andy W. Knight to regard Galtung’s theory as the origins of peacebuilding (Knight, 2004, p. 357).

9 Peace research theory also refers to positive peace as the “peace with justice”(Fetherston 2000:202).

in the conflict resolution theory. This is particularly noticeable in the work of John Burton and his sociologically rooted conflict resolution approach.

## 2.2. John Burton: “Human Needs” Approach

In the long run, the conflict outcomes are not and cannot be determined by the power, states John Burton. Power is the category difficult to define while conflict is significantly determined by the subjective categories that often leave little or no space for the rational analysis by its protagonists.<sup>10</sup>

Burton’s alternative view of conflict is based on his “human needs” approach. In the “human needs theory”, later called the “generic theory of conflict”, Burton argues that the deep-rooted conflict is caused by the denial of the basic human needs. Originally, he has posited nine universal human needs, three of which are particularly important: *identity*, *security* and *distributive justice*. While the interests are subject to negotiation, the universal needs are not because their pursuit is the ontological necessity of all human beings (Burton 1987:29). These ontological necessities may be suppressed in certain periods but they will always reappear, creating the conditions for the “protracted social conflicts”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the satisfaction of the basic human needs is the core condition for the long lasting, “sustainable peace”.

Crucial for the analysis of the practical implication of his human needs theory is the fact that human needs are not subject to the economic/resource scarcity, in other words, more for one group does not necessarily mean less for another. This feature of human needs, as he defines them, has served as a sound basis for his problem-solving methodology and win-win scenario.<sup>12</sup> Conflict, according to Burton, should be approached as a socio-biological problem and the third party’s role is to establish conditions in which the parties to the conflict would get the chance to identify and define their conflict. The conflict resolution should offer methodologies, Burton argues, that would facilitate the problem-solving process and thus support design of the innovative solutions for the existing conflict of interests. Burton calls as well for a mediated social action, the role of which would be to support the process of problem-reframing. Only the reframing of the problems, he argues, can open a social space for the creative solutions. The establishment of the supportive framework where the individuals at all levels will get the opportunity to communicate with each other should be seen as essential in this regard. The task of mediator (third party) is to make available the necessary knowledge, including the references to similar situations, in order to help the parties to understand why and how the escalation of the conflict happened. A mediator should also make the parties aware that each of them probably has

10 This Burton’s statement points at the fact that the rational insights do not play crucial role in the phases of incitement and escalation of conflict. For instance, the knowledge of one party of the conflict that the other party possesses greater power does not necessarily lead to the termination of conflict.

11 According to Azar, the protracted social conflict is conflict that occurs “when communities are deprived of satisfaction of their basic needs on the basis of their communal identity”(Azar 1990:12).

12 Researchers Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1988) have identified three distinct methods which are used by parties to dispute: a) power-based approach (parties attempt to prove whose power is dominant); b) rights-based approach (parties attempt to prove who is ‘right’); and c) interest-based approach, also called “problem solving” (parties attempt to reconcile their major interests through the innovative solutions). The first two approaches tend to create zero sum (win-lose) outcomes while the goal of the “problem-solving” approach is the achievement of a positive sum (win-win) outcome (Peck 1998:22).

the same negative image of the other, image based on stereotypes that arose in the course of the conflict. This type of contact is supposed to increase confidence and trust, leading to a better common understanding. In effect, this means that a discussion of the official matters can take place at a more informal level, for instance via facilitated “workshop” approach, so that the civil-society actors can also find their way into the official debates. As Richmond observes, John Burton’s problem-solving approach brought the individual back into the realm of conflict management and “made the case that conflict can be resolved at the diplomatic level only with the consent of the individual citizen” (Richmond 2002:9). As a consequence, the contemporary peace operations became enriched with the innovative practices the origin of which can be drawn from the Burton’s theoretical approach (Richmond 2002:81).

Although he is one of the most influential scholars in the field of conflict research, Burton has been also widely criticized for his universal approach to human needs and for the conflict resolution methods he developed. The central point of the critics, when it comes to his universal approach to human needs, was the absence of the method by which their existence can be tested. With regard to his problem-solving “workshop” approach, it was noted that this approach could have only a limited application. Distortions caused by the faulty communications, asymmetry, and the lack of a common cultural ground, (Cohen 2001) could seriously affect our capability to apply this conflict resolution method. Moreover, some authors argue that its allegedly ‘universal’ character is rather problematic and that it tends to impose as dominant the Western style discourse (Van der Merwe 1993:266-267).

### **2.3. Edward E. Azar: Protracted Social Conflict**

In parallel to Burton’s efforts to bring an individual back into the focus of the conflict resolution theory, Edward A. Azar calls for an end to the traditional distinction between the internal and external models of conflicts. Azar brings the focus of the conflict theory on the evident rather than hidden dimensions of conflict. His concept of “protracted social conflict” depicts intractable, seemingly irresolvable conflicts, which involve sporadic outbreaks of violence resulting from communal and ethnic cleavages. The notion of “protracted social conflict” threw a new light on the seemingly inexplicable behaviour of certain communal groups by explaining it as prolonged struggle for the basic human needs. As such, Azar’s theoretical contribution was an important step forward for the post-Cold War conflict theory in its efforts to get out of the state-centric understanding of the international system.

In Azar’s work, development is equated with peace. Azar identifies the repression and deprivation of human needs as the roots of the protracted conflict and emphasises the role of structural factors, such as the underdevelopment. He also stresses that the main way to reduce the impact of the external systemic causes of the protracted social conflict is to build responsive social institutions that could diminish their influence. (Azar 1990:133).

Even more importantly, Azar warns that the traditional peace initiatives, which are largely based on patron-client relationship, could further fragment domestic political institutions and aggravate conflict situations. Hence, he suggests that the strategies aimed at altering the usually existing patron-client relationship need to be supported through the multilateral efforts. The complexity of protracted social conflict, according to Azar, postulates two important assignments for those involved in peacebuilding undertakings: a) careful

tracking of the dynamics of conflict, and b) focus at the social, economic and political roots of the conflict. The protracted social conflict is the most severe challenge for those concerned with peacebuilding, reminds Azar, and if the peace approach is too narrowly conceptualized and is failing to address the roots and the underlying dynamics which drive the protracted social conflict, a cycle of violence and despair could be further deepened (Azar 1990).

Edward E. Azar's new methodological stance, which merged realists', structuralists', and pluralists' approaches into the multidimensional understanding of conflict, could be read as an announcement of Lederach's comprehensive approach to conflict resolution.

#### 2.4. John Paul Lederach: Conflict Transformation<sup>13</sup>

While working as scholar-practitioner in different parts of the world, John Paul Lederach has formulated the approach to conflict that encompasses "the full array of stages and approaches needed to transform conflict towards sustainable, peaceful relations and outcomes" (Ramsbotham 2000:171). What Lederach calls the "comprehensive approach" to conflict resolution is his attempt to integrate short-term intervention the goal of which is to halt violence within the long-term conflict resolution process. The core idea of his long-term conflict resolution strategy is the importance of identifying and supporting "the cultural modalities and resources" within the setting of the conflict:

"The principle of indigenous empowerment suggests that conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily 'see' the setting and the people in it as the 'problem' and the outsider as the 'answer'. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting." (Lederach 1995:212).

Lederach's comprehensive approach entails building of an infrastructure for peace, which should involve all levels of the affected population. Sustainable and long-term strategy to conflict resolution hence should necessarily involve active participation of all segments of the affected population.

In Lederach's work, a conflict affected society is portrayed as a pyramid. Key military and political leaders are situated at the apex of a pyramid. Leaders are in the middle in the sectors such as health, education and those placed high in the military hierarchies, who "hold the potential for helping to establish a relationship and skill-based infrastructure for sustaining the peacebuilding process" (Lederach 1997:51). Finally, at the grass roots level is a vast majority of the affected groups: the common people, refugees and IDPs, church groups, local leaders, etc. For the conflict resolution to be successful and sustainable, the co-ordination of peacebuilding strategies at all three societal levels needs to be undertaken. Furthermore, the different types of actors (levels) have to be matched with the different peacebuilding methodologies (Lederach 1997:44-54).

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13 Certain scholars place Lederach into the new and separate phase of the development of conflict theory called conflict transformation or alternatively, peacebuilding. See Fetherstone (2000) and Richmond (2002). On the contrary Ramsbotham (2000), Woodhouse (2000), Duffey (2000), etc., situate Lederach's opus within the broader framework of the conflict resolution theories.

The peacebuilding methodologies, in Lederach's opinion, have to be adjusted to the three-level system. He has created different methods for each level of the affected population. At the top level, a "top-down" approach should be applied. This approach should involve intermediaries or mediators backed by the foreign governments or international organizations and the goal of it is a negotiated settlement. The second level is where the problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution trainings and the development of peace commissions should take place. The third level demands grass-roots, bottom-up approaches.

According to Lederach, peacebuilding from below (bottom-up approach) is of decisive importance since only in that way peace can be achieved in accordance with the context and not imposed from the outside.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Lederach emphasizes the role of the middle-range actors since they have the greatest potential for constructing the foundations of peace due to their impact at both top and bottom levels. Taking into account that in the conventional practice of conflict resolution, the actors coming from outside of the conflict (diplomats, peacebuilders, etc.) were valued more highly than the peacemaking resources within the community, Lederach's approach brought an immense shift in the peacebuilding practice.

Both conflict and reconciliation are embedded in relationship between parties, which is commonly the first victim of the violent conflict. For Lederach, reconciliation is central for the conflict transformation. For that reason he suggests a move away from "a concern with the resolution of issues [...] toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationship [by using] the relational aspect of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding" (Lederach 1997:24). In his opinion, the reconciliation is a process which can create social space for facing the past, envisioning the common future, and through that make possible the process of re-framing of the present. While emphasizing the importance of the reconciliation, Lederach refers to the Azar's notion of "protracted social conflict" and shows that such a conflict requires strategies that go beyond the international relations methodology of conflict management. Developing recognition of relational interdependence - across the lines of conflict and across all levels of society - is perhaps the single most important goal we can pursue in the deep-rooted conflict, argues Lederach. Only this can provide "a set of lenses and a long-term, lifetime perspective, which sharpens and informs short-term decisions" (Lederach, Sampson 2000:55).

This Lederach's analysis also served as a basis for his "integrated framework of peacebuilding". In the "integrated framework of peacebuilding" the actors and specific methodologies are subsystems that enable peacebuilding strategies to be developed from a local situation while taking into account the systemic (structural) problems. In the Lederach's model, a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution and a process-oriented approach are combined in order to address the multidimensional nature of protracted social conflicts. But, "this systemic analysis is only one half or one axis of the integrated framework" (Fetherston 2000:205). Another half comprises the time-dimension of peacebuilding. Its first segment refers to the crisis intervention (2-6 months); the second to the preparation and training for the change (1-2 years); the third to the design of social change (5-10 years) and the fourth, eventually, to the fulfilment of the desired future (20 years on). Lederach's approach to peacebuilding as a set of subsystems that have to be properly integrated is

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14 Different interpretation of this segment of Lederach's theory in: (Fetherston 2000): 205-206).

significant because it points out in a new and qualitatively different way to the importance of a long-term strategic planning.

### 3.. CONCLUSION

The conflict resolution theories developed in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century have signified radical shift in the understanding of the paths towards the sustainable peace. The new insights into the root-causes of conflict have lead to better understanding of the nature and complexity of the contemporary conflicts. The new way of thinking about the conflict called for new techniques to deal with the structural violence in the war-torn countries. The conflict resolution approach also brought the individual back into the realm of the international activities for the restoration of peace. By emphasizing the importance of the reconciliation process sustained by the networks and mechanisms aimed at promoting social justice, as the guiding principle in securing the fulfilment of universal human needs, the conflict resolution theory lead to the development of multi-actor and multidimensional approaches to conflict. It has become the theoretical stronghold of the critics of the state-centric, static and mono-dimensional nature of the traditional diplomacy and peace-keeping operations. Eventually, the conflict resolution framework developed by these theories became embodied in the multifaceted peace operations - the operations where the third parties, acting in coordination, employ diverse instruments adjusted to the different levels of the conflict situation and its actors.

The deeper insights into the root-causes of conflict were the key factor in the defeat of the *Realpolitik* and the opening of the new perspectives in the conflict theories. The focus was shifted from the state security to a more normative vision of human security. The new policies on human security, placed in the context of a globalized and fragmented world, have begun to refer to the fundamentals such as human rights, economic development, and freedom from identity and representational constraints.

The real-life application of those new policies, however, has once again raised the controversial question of whether the proposed conflict resolution methods are possible within the current international system. Whether the UN's "standard operating procedure", as Oliver Ramsbotham has described the institutional rigidity of the United Nations system, can put the theory into practice (Ramsbotham 2000:170). The conflict resolution theory has developed the set of assumptions about the conflict resolution in the intrastate wars. Those assumptions have then become part of the new, global peace agenda established on the principles of liberalization and democratization. Yet, now, more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international instruments for the application of that agenda started to look like "Wittgenstein's locomotive cabin in which a uniform-looking set of handles in fact fulfils a number of diverse functions".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein's locomotive used as a metaphor means that most of us are increasingly remote from all but the most superficial understanding of the underlying functions of the tools we rely on (Ramsbotham 2000:170).

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