Unit C 2: Introduction to peace and conflict studies

1.   Summary

Peace and conflict research has changed in recent decades: There have been some major shifts in topics and issues as well as in methodological approaches. In particular, interest in constructivist and systems theory approaches has grown in recent years, and this has been reflected in peace and conflict research.

2.   On the development of peace and conflict research

In their introduction, Peter Schlotter and Simone Wisotzki (2011:18-23) distinguished the following phases in German-language peace and conflict research:

- **1970s: critical versus traditional peace research.** In this context, critical peace research saw itself as an emancipative science aimed at promoting social change, cf. Galtung's concept of structural violence and the positive/broad concept of peace (cf. Schlotter/Wisotzki 2011:19). In contrast, the representatives of traditional peace research advocated a narrow, negative concept of peace, in the sense of peace as "no war" or the reduction of violence.

- **1980s: Peace research as a science accompanying politics.** These approaches were considered application-oriented, rather far from debates on principles and distant from theory (cf. Schlotter/Wisotzki 2011:20), however, this was only partly true. Thus, many empirically substantial studies were made on the basis of "medium-range" theories. Feminist peace research, in the context of which various fundamental debates were revived in the 1980s, was of a somewhat different nature. These were concerned with gender perspectives in peace and conflict research, with the term "gender approach" (Locher 2000), "social constructivist feminism" (Skjelsbaek 2001) or "postmodern feminism" (Goldstein 2001) being used as appropriate.

- **1990s:** Now, in connection with the wars in the former Yugoslavia, questions of military interventions were in the center, as well as the constructivism debate (cf. Schlotter/Wisotzki 2011:21/22). In the process, questions of value orientation were

called into doubt in the course of the "constructivist turn": the new, constructivist approach "looks at the ideational foundations of political action and places the question of the relevance of ideas, norms, and identities at the center of scientific analysis" (Schlotter/Wisotzki 2011:22). In this context, functions, intentions and processes in particular became the focus of research.

One of the classic areas of research in peace and conflict studies is **war causation research**. It is based on the assumption that there might be "general, deeper causes for all wars or for a certain type of wars, which are scientifically researchable and can possibly be eliminated by appropriate political and social actions" (Jahn 2012:95).

Since the mid-1970s, comprehensive sociopolitical and historical theoretical designs have become rare in peace research (see Jahn 2012:97). In the past decades, peace and conflict research focused on partial, situational theories and contexts.

Compared to research on the causes of war, **research on the causes of peace** is much more recent, because it used to be assumed that peace would emerge when the causes of war were eliminated. Today, actual peace cause research is conducted for two reasons: First, it deals with crises that contemporaries assumed must "inevitably" lead to wars, which was not the case. The focus is on war prevention and peace policy. Second, peace causation research addresses the question of why a lasting peace has prevailed in certain regions of the world for many decades without any indication that this might change in the foreseeable future (cf. Jahn 2012:98).

Another topic of peace and conflict research is the study of armaments. This includes the **arms behavior** of individual states and **the development of arms spending**. For example, in 2009, an estimated US $1531 billion was spent, or 2.7% of the world's gross national product. The United States alone spent US $661 billion, or 4.3% of its gross domestic product, on armaments, and Germany spent $45.6 billion, or 1.3% of its gross domestic product (Jahn 2012:104).

Other topics of peace and conflict studies are **international peace law** and **global governance**.

In addition, peace and conflict research also deals with **interstate, ethnonational, and religious conflicts**.

Finally, **peace education** has long been a concern and topic of peace and conflict research.

2.1   On the concept of conflict in peace research

Without going into detail here on the various conflict terms and concepts - cf. in detail ► Unit C 1: "Conceplt of Conflict" - it should be noted here that the understanding of conflict has also changed considerably in peace and conflict research.

For many years, the vision of a harmonious society without conflict prevailed even among scholars. To this day, many people have the wish for a conflict-free society.

It was not until the 1960s that sociologists such as Ralf Dahrendorf (cf. Dahrendorf 1961:235) or Jürgen Habermas (1981) began to view conflict in societies as normal, because every interaction is accompanied by conflict. Yes, many sociologists and political scientists today see social conflicts as driving factors of social progress (cf. Jahn 2012:32).

Ralf Dahrendorf (1961:212) was one of the first to understand conflict as a "necessary factor in all processes of change," rather than a disruptive deviation from a society's harmonious normality. According to Bogner (2011:50), Dahrendorf's fundamental contribution to this day lies in this "valorization of the concept of conflict and at the same time de-dramatization of conflict." However, Bogner (2011:51) notes in Dahrendorf's work at the same time a "tendency to ontologize conflicts," which - according to Bogner (2011:51) - "defines them out of the realm of social action."

Today, conflicts are understood as a normal part of social relations (cf. Coleman et al 2011:40).

Jahn (2012:32) wrote on the role of conflict in democracies, "Democratic societies affirm conflict and even institutionalize it, for example, the election campaign as an essential element of a never-ending and never-should-be-ending conflict between political parties over temporary or legally limited power. ... Societies that, like the communist party society, deny and seek to suppress conflicts tend, according to Dahrendorf, not only toward a totalitarian understanding of peace that is hostile to conflict and seeks to demonstrate complete social harmony and unity, but also toward creating situations in which suppressed conflicts will one day express themselves uncontrollably and violently" (Jahn 2012:32). However, from today's perspective, one could object that formal democracies institutionalize the resolution of conflicts only superficially and that the disputes between parties with more or less regular changes of government suppress the fundamental underlying conflicts of a society and that the party-democratic game is only a kind of pseudo-democracy. In this way, not a single democracy has been able to solve the major issues of our time, such as the economic crisis of 2008/2009, the European debt crisis of 2011/2012, or the high risks such as the nuclear disaster in Fukushima (Japan) in 2011.

It is all the more doubtful that Herfried Münkler's assertion (in Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 22.9.2014:15) that "we have become more and more peaceful in the course of our history" is true. Even if one sees the wars in the first half of the 20th century as a "striking exception" (Münkler in Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 22.9.2014:15) to this development, and violence was undoubtedly a constant companion of everyday life in archaic societies, it must be remembered that the quality and variety of violence has undoubtedly increased - and its media implementation has also been perfected.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that since Emperor Augustus peace has become "a guiding principle of good government" (Münkler in Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 22.9.2014:15). But one could also argue that warlike violence has simply shifted away from the center of Europe to the continental borders and to Africa, the Arab and Central Asian regions. But this was already the case in the heyday of the Roman Empire or even for a time in the Islamic classical period. The question of more or less violence is above all a question of the strength of the state system in question.

2.2 On constructivist and systems-theoretical peace and conflict research

According to Coleman et al. (2011:47), any peace intervention must be careful not to oversimplify ("oversimplify") the problems facing the intervention. Rather, the key elements of the conflict system must be identified in order to initiate changes that are appropriate to the complexity of the situation. In this context, both the actors ("elements") of a conflict system relationships with each other and the delimitation of the conflict system from the environment are important (for a detailed discussion of the current debate on systemic peace research, see Körppen/Ropers/Giessmann 2011 and, more generally, on systems theory, cf. ► Unit I 8: "Systems Theory").

Too many peacebuilding projects are still characterized by a linear and dualistic logic - often the perception of conflict is reduced to a linear "tunnel vision" that leads to a conflict resolution strategy based on a process that goes from A to B (cf. Körppen/Ropers 2011:11). In contrast, experience shows that the creation and development of peacebuilding strategies takes the form of dynamic, non-linear processes (cf. Körppen/Ropers 2011:11; for more detail on peacebuilding process issues, cf. ► Unit C 24: "Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping"). Systemic thinking is based on the following principles:

- Thinking in network structures,
- thinking in dynamic frameworks and in categories of relationships,
- not focusing exclusively on problems or existing conflicts, but perceiving approaches to solutions that are already inherent in the conflict system,
- recognizing and using ambivalences and perspective dependencies, and
- centering on human beings and their learning processes (cf. Körppen/Ropers 2011:12).

This kind of thinking in peace and conflict research, but also in peacebuilding processes, is relatively new (cf. Körppen/Ropers 2011:14). It manifests itself in the form of "multi-track diplomacy", i.e. in the effort to take many paths and peacebuilding measures and initiatives in parallel. This involves using targeted inputs to purposefully change existing conflict

systems, foster emerging networks, and "hear" or "understand" how existing systems operate-including through beliefs, behaviors, and relationships.

Bernshausen and Bonacker (2011:33) have suggested that for the purpose of changing conflict systems, a type of "resilience management" should be applied. The term comes from social-ecological systems theory and means the following:

- Moving from a less desirable to a more desirable behavior,

- preventing a system from moving to an undesirable state as a result of external stress or disturbance, and

- reinforcing and promoting those elements of a system that help it to renew itself, reorganize itself, or change (cf. Bernshausen/Bonacker 2011:33).

One thing, however, all new (and old!) approaches in peace and conflict research cannot negate: Whatever the causes of a war or an armed conflict are - i.e. economic interests, power politics, struggle and resources or ideological conflicts - it always also depends on the readiness or the will to wage or start a war. If groups or political currents - or individual politicians! - If groups or political currents - or individual politicians! - want to fight conflicts with weapons, they usually find reasons for it: Be it to protect their own ethnic group, be it to secure autonomy or even independence for a part of the population of a country (Ukraine!) or to prevent such autonomy or independence, be it to enforce economic interests (e.g. access to raw material reserves) - or simply to distract from domestic political difficulties. Everything is done to hit the opponent at his weakest point. For example, on September 26, 2016, Indian Prime Minister Modi declared that India wanted to control the water on the upper reaches of the Indus River itself and no longer hold cooperation talks on the joint use of Indus water by India and Pakistan. The reason given was Pakistan's insufficient efforts, in India's eyes, to fight Islamic terrorism. If one knows that 77% of the Pakistani population of currently about 190 million inhabitants are dependent on Indus water (see Pabst in Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 28.8.2016:6), then one can guess what this must mean for Pakistan: This country will have no choice but to force India - even by force of arms! - to try to force India to grant Pakistan access to sufficient water reserves. This is how you create wars!

3. Control Questions

1. Which three phases has peace research gone through since the 1970s?

2. What substantive issues and thematic areas have been addressed in peace research?

3. How has the concept of conflict changed in recent decades?

4. Have people become more "peaceful" - give reasons for your opinion!

5. What is constructivist and systems theory peace research about?

6. Which logic still characterizes many peacebuilding projects?

7. On which principles is systemic thinking based?

8. What is the aim of the "Resilience Management" proposed by Bernshausen and Bonacker?

4. Links

Friedensforschung: Königswege und Zauberformeln
http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/politik/friedensforschung-koenigswege-und-zauberformeln-1605150.html

Radikaler Konstruktivismus und praktische Anwendung
http://www.radikalerkonstruktivismus.de/

Vom Unbehagen am Normverlust zum Unbehagen mit der Norm?
Zu einem fundamentalen Problem der neueren Friedensforschung
Von Sabine Jaberg
http://ifsh.de/pdf/publikationen/hb/hb152.pdf

Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung
http://www.bundesstiftung-friedensforschung.de/

Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik an der Universität Hamburg
http://ifsh.de/

Was ist Friedensforschung?
http://www.hsfk.de/Was-ist-Friedensforschung.14.0.html

5.   Angeführte und weiterführende Literatur

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