Sociology of War, Peace and Social Conflict

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A human rights-centered sociology must directly address the questions of war and peace. Indeed it can be argued that security is a human right and that no lasting peace is conceivable without the realization of justice and human rights. In an age of nuclear weapons and the globalization of violence there is no social problem more pressing than war and no need more urgent than peace. Yet surprisingly mainstream sociology has largely overlooked both issues. In a study of American and European main sociological journals, Garnett (1988) found that war is not perceived as an important research topic in sociology. Fortunately, there has been a recent resurgence of interest among a specialized circle of sociologists in the study of violence and war. (Mann 1988; Giddens 1985; Collins 2008; Malesevic 2010; Kestnbaum 2009; Shaw 2000; Tilly 1992; Skocpol 1979; and Joas 2003)

Many sociologists including Giddens (1985), Mann (1988), and Joas (2003), have commented on the neglect of the issues of war and peace in classical sociological literature. Three main reasons for this neglect have been proposed: the appearance of a relatively long period of peace in 19th century Europe between 1815 and 1914, the reduction of the concept of society to the category of nation state, and the optimistic faith in modernity as the age of rationality, progress, and development.

Yet Malesevic (2010:17-49) proposes that classical sociological theory was dominated by the bellicose tradition. However, after the World War II, the revulsion against war brought about a reinvention of the classical tradition and turned it into a peaceful tradition. Malesevic reminds us of authors like Gumplowicz, Ratzenhofer, Ward, Simmel, Oppenheimer, Rostow, Pareto and Mosca who presented a sociological theory that was centered in war and national conflict.

 In what follows I first address the relationship of war to other forms of violence and social conflict and then discuss the issues of war and peace in classical sociological theory. Next I explore alternate theories of war and peace. Finally, I will analyze the relationship of modernity to war, explore the relation of a discourse of peace with a human-rights paradigm of sociology, and conclude with some suggestions for further research.

War and Other Forms of Violence

There is a dialectical relationship between war and other forms of violence. On the one hand, war is a special case of violence whose proper analysis requires understanding the mutual relationships among alternate types of violence. On the other hand, war is a unique form of violence. The emphasis on the mutual interaction of war and other forms of violent conflict is one of the central contributions of sociological literature. Consequently a sociological analysis of

war or peace will address questions of justice and structural violence. Thus, for example, religious fanaticism, patriarchy, racism, ideologies of national superiority, poverty, social inequality and class oppression are linked to militarism, war, and the dehumanization of the enemy.

Such sociological insight is compatible with a positive definition of peace. Negative peace is the absence of war. For Galtung (1996), however, war is the absence of peace. Positive peace refers to an objective form of social relations that foster harmony, mutual growth, communication, and unity among the interacting partners. In such a definition, the absence of coercive conflicts is a necessary but not sufficient condition of peace. Positive peace therefore depends on the existence of social justice and a culture of communication, peace, and human rights. Violence is conceptualized as systematic denial of human needs and human rights. It can be direct or structural, physical or ideal. The idea of positive peace assigns conceptual primacy to peace rather than war. It is in this spirit that Collins (1974) distinguishes between three types of violence as ferociousness or direct coercion against others, callousness or impersonal structural violence, and asceticism or violence directed against one's own self.

At the same time, wars are highly organized forms of social conflict that are qualitatively different from ordinary form of violence. In his book *Violence*, Collins (2008) discusses ordinary forms of violence to highlight the fact that contrary to the prevalent ideas, human beings abhor violence, try to avoid it, and seek alternative ways to save face without engaging in physical fight. The principal error of various macro theories of violence is that they all assume that violence comes easily to individuals. Criticizing various myths about violence, Collins argues that contrary to a common Hollywood portrayal of violence, ordinary violence rarely occurs, is very short in duration, is not infectious, and is accompanied by intense anxiety rather than a joking attitude. Even literature on war shows that soldiers frequently prefer to escape rather than fight, and are intensely afraid and anxious, a fact that explains the prevalence of friendly fire (Picq 2006, Marshall 1947). Such a perspective is completely at odds with a neo-social Darwinist ideology which sees aggression as a biologically induced tendency among young males in order to further the reproduction of their genes. (Wilson 1978:125-30)

For war to take place extensive social organization is necessary in order to compel individuals to engage in military conflict and kill other human beings. As Malesevic argues, human beings, left to their own devices, "are generally incapable of violence and unwilling to kill and die". Therefore it is the "institutional trappings of the networks of organizations and ideological doctrines that make us act more violently" (Maelsevic 2010: 117).

Peace and War in Classical Sociological Theory

War and peace were central questions in the social theories of both Auguste Comte (1970) and Herbert Spencer (1967). Both theorists conceived of social change as evolutionary movements towards progress and characterized the emerging modern society as industrial rather than

military. Industrial society is a peaceful society in which military conquest aimed at acquisition of land is replaced with economic and industrial competition. For Comte this is part of his "law of three stages". Spencer defined a military society as a form of society in which the social function of regulation is dominant. Conversely, in an industrial society it is the economic function that becomes predominant.

With the onset of World War I, most of the social theorists took sides with their own country. A unique case is Georg Simmel (1917) who identified war as an "absolute situation" in which ordinary and selfish preoccupations of the individuals with an impersonal money economy are replaced with an ultimate life and death situation. Thus war liberates moral impulse from the boredom of routine life, and makes individuals willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of society. Simmel's idea is partly rooted in his theory of conflict in which conflict becomes a force of group integration and solidarity (1955).

On the other side we see Durkheim and Mead who both take strong positions against Germany. Discussing Treitschke's worship of war and German superiority, Durkheim (1915) writes of a "German mentality" which led to the militaristic politics of that country. Such militarism is an outdated morality which is opposed to an existing "universal conscience and a universal opinion, and it is no more possible to escape the empire of these than to escape that of physical laws, for they are forces which, when they are violated, react against those who offend them."(1915: 44) A similar analysis is found in the writings of Mead, who contrasts German militaristic politics with Allied liberal constitutions. Kant's distinction between the realm of appearances and the things in themselves has led to a theory in which reason is only capable of legislating the form, but not the content, of the moral act. The determination of practical life is then left in the hands of military elites. Romantic and idealist schools, represented by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, connect this abstract individual to the Absolute Self, demanding obedience to the dictates of the Prussian state. Such a state "could by definition only rest upon force. Militarism became the necessary form of its life." (Mead 1918: 167) While liberal/democratic countries conceptualize the state as a technical means for realizing individual rights, their full realization of democracy requires institutionalization of substantive social rights for the people. It is only in a democratic society and a democratic nationalism that the rule of force and militarism will be abandoned both within and between national borders (Mead: 159-174).

Another classic writer who wrote on war and peace during the World War I is Veblen, who applies his theory of pecuniary emulation to the question of international relations. In his analysis of the leisure class (1991), he argued that consumption has become the main indicator of social honor. Ownership is mainly sought for its role in claiming prestige. It is the emulation and competition for honor that is the main motivation for human behavior. Thus both wasteful conspicuous consumption and leisure become the mark of success in pecuniary emulation. However, this same process of emulation is the basis of the claims for national honor and patriotism. According to Veblen (1998:31-33), patriotism is "a sense of partisan solidarity in respect of prestige" for "the patriotic spirit is a spirit of emulation". No permanent peace is

possible without a fundamental transformation of these patriotic habits of thought. Veblen regards the dynastic militarism of imperial Germany and Japan as a feudal vestige based upon the subservience of people to ruling individuals. Such a system necessarily seeks imperial expansion and initiates war. Liberal states are based on impersonal loyalty to things rather than individuals, and they avoid initiating wars. However, the other cause of war is economic interests of the captains of business and finance. The persistent inequality of possession and control in liberal societies may lead to revolution by the poor. In this situation the liberal states may be tempted to initiate war in order to diffuse the revolutionary sentiments of the workers and farmers. The only thing that is common between the rich and the poor is the sense of patriotism.

Another significant classical theorist who made contributions to the study of war is Werner Sombart. Like Weber (1994), Sombart was interested in understanding the causes of modern capitalism. Like Weber, Sombart emphasized the centrality of both religious and political/military factors in the development of capitalism. He argued (1913) that war between the European states was a major factor in the development of capitalism. It was the development of a standing army, and the state's demand for military uniforms, weapons, and naval ships that created the first mass demand for economic production, leading to the development of large-scale capitalistic enterprise. Modernity, in other words, is unthinkable without its genesis in war.

No discussion of classical social theorists is complete without referring to the ideas of Marx and Weber. Both are indispensable for any analysis of war or peace. Marxian tradition has always been a main theoretical model for such analysis. On the other hand, most of the recent sociological contributions to the issue of war and violence are inspired by a Weberian model emphasizing the significance of the modern state and the rationalization of coercion and discipline. I will discuss both traditions in the subsequent sections.

Principal Theories of War and Peace

Social scientific literature seeks social reasons for war and investigates the social conditions that are conducive to peace. Here we discuss five such theories.

1. Realism

Realism is the dominant theory in the field of international relations and it is rooted in a Machiavellian and Hobbesian conception of human beings. Kenneth Waltz introduced the theory of structural realism. According to this model (1979), states are the main actors in international relations. However, the main determinant of a state's decision to engage in war or peace is the international political and military structure. This international structure, however, is none other than international anarchy. In other words, the Hobbesian state of nature is the dominant reality at the level of international relations since there is no binding global law or authority in the world. In this situation states are left in a situation of self help. Consequently, each state regards all other states as a potential or actual threat to its security. Thus arms races and militarism are rational strategies for safeguarding national security. States must act in rational and pragmatic

ways and must not be bound by either internal politics or moral principles in determining their policies. In this situation there is no chance for permanent peace. War is a normal result of the structure of international relations. For Waltz, however, the primary interest of states is security. Therefore, states seek a balance of power. Discussing the so-called "long peace" during the cold war, Waltz argues that this peace was product of the two structural conditions of bipolarity and nuclear armament. Another realist, Mearsheimer (2001), introduced offensive structural realism. In this model states are primarily interested in attaining or securing a hegemonic position.

The closest allies of the realist model in sociological literature are the classical bellicose authors who conceived of social change in terms of a state-centered theory of war and military conflict. Weber partly defends a state-centered concept of Realpolitik. His emphasis on the relativity of all values, his rejection of the ethics of ultimate ends, and his support for the ethics of responsibility in the context of political decision making (Weber 1948: 118-123) are various expressions of this position. Yet, for Weber and the neo-Weberians, realism is an inadequate theory because the state represents the intersection of the internal and the external (Skocpol 1979). Furthermore, sociological literature conceives of international structure in terms of both political/military and economic characteristics. Realist theory is criticized from many directions. In a sense all other theories of war and peace are various forms of rejection of realism.

Paul Joseph (1993) calls for a change of paradigm in understanding the idea of security, replacing a war politics of national security with a peace politics of global security. According to Joseph, realism sees the other states as the main threat to security, whereas peace politics emphasizes the common threats to humanity, namely, environmental pollution, global inequality, poverty, violation of human rights, and nuclear disaster. War politics considers the appropriate response as militarism, whereas peace politics finds de-militarization and global cooperation to be the rational strategy. War politics defines peace in negative terms, while peace politics regards it in positive terms.

2. Democratic Peace theory

One of the most well-known theories in relation to war and peace is a liberal theory according to which democracies rarely if ever engage in war with each other. This doctrine was first advanced in 1875 by Immanuel Kant in his historic work *Perpetual Peace*. During the 20th century multiple theoretical elaborations and empirical testings of the theory have been conducted in peace studies and international relations. Contrary to realism, democratic peace theory seeks the root cause of war or peace in the internal political structure of societies. Varieties of empirical tests have confirmed the existence of a significant positive correlation between democracy and peace (Russet and Oneal 2001). Two sets of explanations have been offered for this relation. Institutional explanations emphasize the existence of systematic restraining forces in democracies. The vote of the people matters in democracies and therefore war is less likely to occur because it is the people rather than the rulers who will pay the ultimate price of war. Cultural explanations argue that democracies respect other democracies and therefore are more

willing to engage in peaceful resolution of conflicts. The internal habit of the democratic resolution of conflicts is said to be extended to the realm of foreign relations. Among classical social theorists there is considerable sympathy for this theory. Durkheim, Mead, and Veblen all identified the cause of World War I as the undemocratic culture and politics of Germany and Japan. Similarly Spencer (1967) finds political democracy compatible with peace.

However, a sociological discussion of democratic peace theory may point to a number of modifications. First it reexamines the concept of democracy and defines it in both formal and substantive ways. Not only Marxists and critical theorists but also Durkheim, Mead and Veblen emphasized the necessity of social democracy in addition to formal political democracy for the existence of a genuine participatory democracy. Secondly, as Held (1995) argues, in a globalized world, where the most important decisions are blind outcomes of the anarchy of particularistic decisions made by states and transnational corporations, democratization of nation states does not furnish a real democracy. Consequently, an adequate theory of democratization must address the issue of arbitrary and particularistic decision making in the context of international anarchy. Such a perspective emphasizes the need for a further extension of democratic decision making to the global level. Strengthening institutions like the United Nations, the World Court, and global civil societies becomes a vital step in attaining peace.

3. Marxist Theory

The Marxist theory of violence can be discussed in terms of three issues: the relation of capitalism to war or peace, the role of violence in transition from capitalism to communism, and the impact of colonialism on the development of colonized societies. The dominant Marxist views on these issues are usually at odds with Marx's own positions.

Marx did not address the issue of war and peace extensively. He shared the 19th century's optimism about the outdated character of interstate wars. In fact he mostly believed that capitalism benefits from peace. He considered (1956: ch. 6) Napoleon's war a product of Napoleon's obsession with fame and glory. As Mann (1987) argues, Marx saw capitalism as a transnational system and therefore he regarded it as a cause of peace rather than war. He believed that violence is mostly necessary for revolution but he affirmed the possibility of peaceful transition to socialism in the most developed capitalist societies. Furthermore, Marx saw colonization of the non-European societies as mostly beneficial for the development of those stagnant societies, a development which in turn would lead to socialist revolutions (Kara 1968).

In the midst of World War I, Lenin (1939) radically changed Marxian theory of war and peace. He argued that imperialism or the competition for colonial conquest necessarily brings Western capitalist states into war with each other. This war would destroy capitalism and lead to the triumph of socialism. Furthermore, violence was the only possible way of attaining socialism (Kara 1968). The main opposition to Lenin's ideas was Kautsky's (1931) defense of a democratic and parliamentary way of achieving socialism. Lenin's predictions proved to be

wrong. In the early 21st century we witness peace among Western capitalist states. More recent Marxist theories are divided in two camps: Some find capitalism engendering war between the imperialist (North) and the dependent (South) countries, while others see it triggering war within and amongst poor countries (Frank 1991, Bauman).

Marxian theory has inspired many sociological theories of war and peace. A prominent case is C.Wright Mill's (1956) famous thesis of the military-industrial complex where the complex unity of military and industrial enterprises creates conditions conducive to war. Another influence can be found in Wallerstein's (1984) theory of the world capitalist system. Through networks of exchange and trade the world is divided into center, periphery and semi-periphery. The structure of this system is the main explanation of wars including hegemonic ones.

4. Symbolic Interactionism and Social constructivism

A sociological perspective that has influenced the field of international relations is the theory of social constructivism. The main advocate of this theory in discussions of war and peace is Alexander Wendt, who systematically criticizes the realist perspective. Emphasizing the symbolic and interpretive character of social relations and practices, Wendt (1999) argues that objective anarchy of international relations by itself does not lead to a system of mutual threat, antagonism, and self help. Rather it is the interpretation of the behavior that determines whether anarchy leads to a system of cooperation and trust among nations or a system of antagonism and distrust. For example, Canada and the United States are two sovereign states neighboring each other. Yet the relation is mutually interpreted as one of trust and cooperation. Similarly, the development of a single nuclear missile in North Korea creates security panic in the United States whereas the existence of a massive nuclear arsenal in England creates no such concern. Consequently it is the way states perceive and interpret identities and interests that determines the prospects of peace and war.

Wendt's theory is influenced by symbolic interactionism. Mead's (1944) emphasis on the social and interactive construction of self, where it comes into existence through language and the internalization of the Generalized Other, is compatible with a host of philosophical and sociological theories that have emphasized the significance of language in defining human reality. Unlike utilitarian and rationalist theories that perceive humans as selfish and competitive, the linguistic turn has emphasized the social and cooperative nature of human beings. Being with others is not an external addition to human consciousness. Rather, it is the very constitutive element of human consciousness and self. For Habermas (1979), for example, the very structure of language presupposes the acknowledgement of the presence and legitimate claim of the other. Thus in the very structure of language the normative legitimacy of arguments and communication is implicit as the regulating principle of social life.

5. Culture of Violence/Peace Theory

Cultural theories emphasize the causal significance of the culture of violence or peace as the main determinant of war or peace. John Mueller (1989) argues that prior to the 20th century war was perceived as a natural, moral, and rational phenomenon. However, through the first and second world wars this culture changed. According to Mueller, the Western world is moving increasingly in this direction with the non-Western world lagging behind. But the future is bright since we are moving in the direction of a culture of peace.

Such a perspective may be compatible with Durkheim's (1933) view of organic solidarity. For Durkheim the appropriate culture corresponding to the modern division of labor is a culture of solidarity that recognizes the differences in the context of the equal right of all individuals to self-determination. Therefore, Durkheim believes, the individual's right to autonomy and individuality becomes the new sacred of the modern society. However, for Durkheim, organic solidarity is associated with the rise of a global human consciousness, where such right is extended to all human beings. (Lukes 1972:550)

Lasting peace, therefore, requires a critique of various forms of the culture of violence. These include, among others, cultures of patriarchy, racism, social Darwinism, religious fanaticism, and aggressive nationalism. For example, a culture of violence defines identities through the opposition of the self to the other, whereas a culture of peace defines identities through their mutual interdependence. Patriarchy becomes particularly important because a patriarchal system is likely to produce a negative type of male identity, one which is defined in terms of the negation of the female (Reardon 1985). This is due to the absence of fathers from home and the consequent negative definition of the father image as non-mother.

There is an extensive debate on the reciprocal effects of patriarchy and militarism. Authors like Mary Caprioli (2000) have found a positive correlation between patriarchy and war, where the low social, political and economic status of women lead to a higher likelihood of interstate wars. On the other hand, many anthropologists (Ember and Ember 1994, Goldstein 2001) have argued that it is war and militarism that lead to violent socialization of males.

A culture of violence is accompanied by a culture of othering and estrangement characterized by the dehumanization of others, reducing them to the level of biology, and violence of singular identity (Sen 2006). Both concepts of social justice and human rights are inseparable principles of a culture of peace.

Modernity, War and the New Wars

As Malesevic (2010: 118-145) notes, a most perplexing character of the 20th century is the fact that while it was a century of almost universal acceptance of the principles of human rights and peace, it was the bloodiest century in the history of humankind. Modernity represents the increasing integration of the state, the military, technology and the economy. War requires extensive and massive social organization. Consequently, the history of modernity is a history of such militaristic, technological, and nationalistic integration and mobilization. Sociologists like

Mann (1988), Giddens (1985) and Tilly (1992) have studied the rise of the modern state and nationalist ideologies. Their main inspiration is Max Weber's concept of the modern state and bureaucratization. War and coercion played a crucial role in the creation of the present system of nationalism. Military competition among the European states led to the military revolution, the rise of standing army, the emergence of the conscript army, military discipline, and national integration of the populace in war industry. It was partly this bureaucratization of the army that led to the bureaucratization of other aspects of society, shaping the factory in the image of the army.

Max Weber defined the modern state as having monopolistic control of the means of coercion. In the modern state industry, technology and war become increasingly integrated. The machine gun, the train, the telegraph, airplanes, and high tech/nuclear war have transformed the nature of modern warfare. Equally important was the rise of nationalistic ideologies which opened the masses to militarism. Napoleon introduced national mobilization of people, propaganda and revolutionary zeal to the art of death and militarism, replacing the old army with a conscript citizen army. Nationalism increasingly became the most powerful determinant of identity in modern world, replacing religion as the center of the mobilization of emotions.

The paradox of the 20th century can therefore be explained by the interaction of various causes. First, the destructive character of recent military technology has increased the deadly nature of war. Second, the rise of popular nationalism has led to mass participation of citizens with patriotic and ideological zeal in war. Third, the justification of violence by an instrumental ethics has legitimized all kinds of wars in the name of peace and justice. Fourth, the integration of industry and the military has eroded the distinction between civilian and military institutions. In spite of modern agreements to confine war to the military sector and protect civilians from military violence, the 20th century became the century of total war. Both popular support of war and the integration of industry and the military encouraged the destruction of the industrial and civilian infrastructure of the enemy. World War II was a major expression of this type of war. It eroded the distinction between the soldier and the civilian. Civilian Industry and infrastructure of the enemy became the legitimate target of military attack.

Yet the three developments of the end of modernism, the end of the cold war, and globalization have led to some weakening of national sovereignty and nationalistic identification. They have turned some social movements like human rights, environment, and peace movements into global civil societies. As Kaldor (2003) notes, this development represents a hopeful path of peace for the future.

But they also have triggered the rise of new wars and global uncivil societies. According to Kaldor (1999), new wars are qualitatively different from the old wars. The aim of new war is usually extermination or mass expulsion of the "other," whereas in the old war the aim was securing geopolitical control. New war is frequently based on identity politics, and therefore the other must be eliminated. The means utilized by old war were a centralized professional military.

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New war uses gangs of decentralized warlords and criminal groups, even child soldiers, for murder. The basis of finance of old war was the state treasury and taxation, whereas its base in new war is criminal enterprise as well as the financial support of sympathetic people in other parts of the world. New wars are usually associated with failed states unable to have any meaningful control of the means of coercion in their territory. This state failure is influenced by both the end of the cold war and globalization of economic competition.

What emerges from the story of new wars is the insightful removal of the distinction between the war hero and the criminal, corresponding to the elimination of the distinction between military and civilian targets. However, new war is partly a further extension of the modern concept of total war. Critique of nationalism is indeed a critique of this distinction.

Research Suggestions

The question of peace is inseparable from major sociological categories. The relation between militarism and social inequality, patriarchy, racism, religious intolerance, and political repression needs more sociological research. Peace movements should be studied more closely. Finally, research on the social construction of a culture of violence, and the interaction of nationalism and capitalism can further enrich sociological discourse.

A human-rights centered sociology will define peace in positive ways, emphasize the connection between violence and injustice, assign theoretical primacy to the study of peace rather than war, question the pervasive and alienating cultural and institutional habits of thought related to identity politics, nationalism, and national security, while promoting a holistic orientation to the study of war and peace. In addition, such paradigm will question the traditional distinction between facts and values, and would approach peace studies in the same way that positive science approaches medical studies. In both cases study of facts is accompanied with a normative commitment to universalism and health. Methodologically, such perspective will embrace not only positivistic but also hermeneutical and critical methods of studying war and peace. The perspective of human rights would encourage the discourse of war and peace to overcome disciplinary reifications, include questions regarding nationalism, national security, connection of war to patriarchy, racism, and social inequality- issues that are normally excluded from the dominant literature on international relations. Finally, a human rights paradigm will transcend the nationalistic heritage of 19th century sociology, appropriates the discourse of globalization in all sociological studies, and consequently, address the issues of war and peace as central questions of sociological theory.

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