Unit C 1: Concept of Conflict

1.   Summary

The point here cannot be to develop a sociology of conflict. Rather, some basic concepts and contexts around social conflicts should be addressed. What are conflicts, according to which mechanisms do radicalizations occur and which (non-violent) conflict resolution methods are available?

2.   Terms of conflict

The term "conflict" originates from Latin and was adopted into the German language relatively late, in the 18th century (cf. Jahn 2012:31). It goes back to the Latin verb confligere, part. conflictus, and originally meant "to push together," "to strike together," or "to clash." Today, the word "conflict" is used very broadly, to refer to any form of clash of interests, dispute, or other form of disagreement.

Jahn (2012:31) points out that "conflict" is also used as a trivializing term for war, such as in the United Nations jargon for post-conflict peacebuilding. Cf. also ► Unit C 18: "War as armed conflict."

For Herzlieb (2012:9), a conflict exists when
-        at least two "elements" - for instance in the form of thoughts, desires, goals, but also persons or groups - are present,
-        which can be determined at the same time,
-        which are opposed to each other and
-        appear incompatible,
-        when the situation is experienced as stressful or disturbing,
-        when pressure to perform arises, and
-        when there are escalation tendencies.

It is crucial to **distinguish between violent and non-violent conflicts**. A distinction must be made between physical, i.e. physical violence, and structural violence, which manifests itself as social injustice or a structural relationship of dependency.

Conflicts of values are a special type of conflict. Conflicts of values - in contrast to conflicts of interest, for example - are defined as opposing attitudes toward basic ideas, values or concepts of humanity. But are there really conflicts between values?

Berkel (2011:90) writes apodictically: "It is not values but people who come into conflict. Many people perceive a questioning of "their" values as a personal attack on their identity or even personality. We are accustomed to speak of value conflicts, but closely examined, value conflicts are usually personal attacks on people - what they represent is thereby used as a target of attack, so to speak, or as an "identificatory enemy image."

According to John Forester (2009:59ff.), values should always be distinguished from interests.

Interests	Values
are negotiable	are not negotiable
are compensable	are not compensable
are bound to goods	are bound to our identity
if they remain unfulfilled, we are disappointed	if we sacrifice them, we feel guilty

Quelle: Berkel 2011:91.

So-called value conflicts usually move at a high level of escalation. The conflicting parties appear irreconcilable, unyielding in their demands, reject compromises even if they would bring them advantages, do not trust each other, react irritably and emotionally, consider the conflict unsolvable and attach great importance to symbols (cf. Berkel 2011:91). To outsiders, value conflicts often appear irrational and unreasonable, especially when they do not share the values of the conflicting parties. It is true for everyone that value conflicts are more difficult to handle in direct conflict management because one cannot simply go back to the interests of the adversaries - as suggested, for example, in the Harvard Negotiation Project method - but because complex and often only partially conscious basic ideas and ideological attitudes play into the conflict. Not infrequently, differences at the value level are
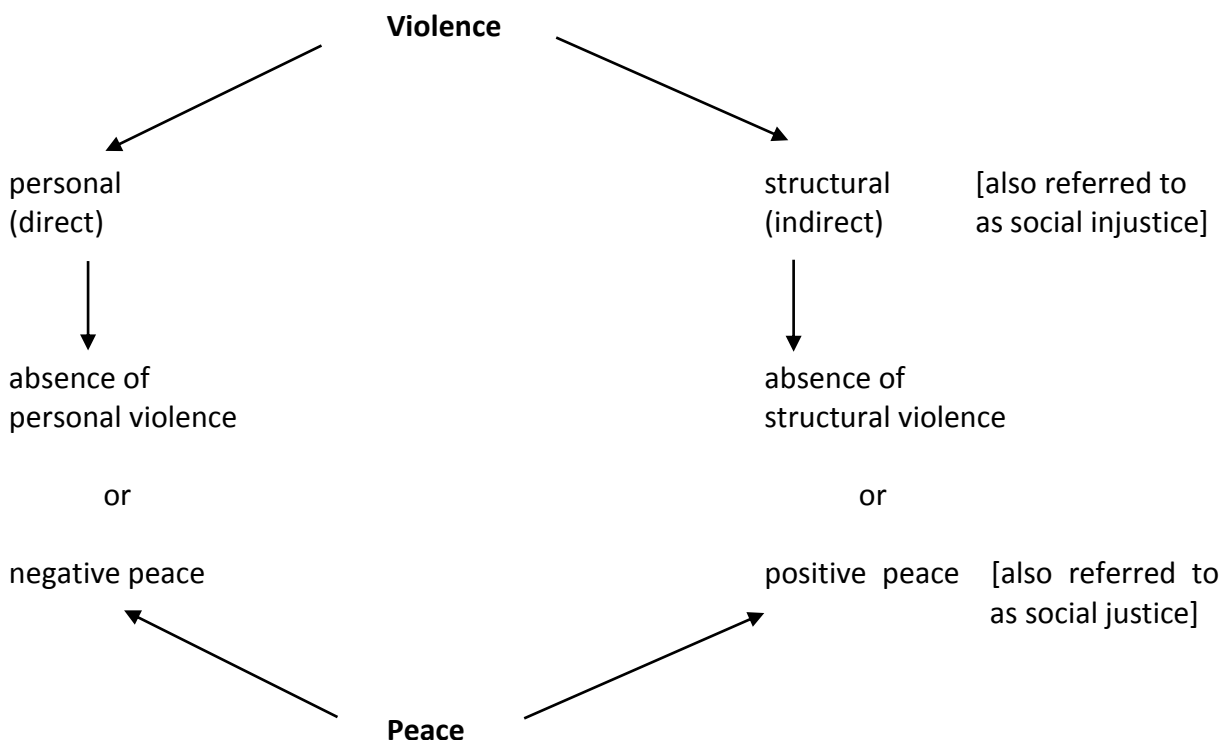
also used to make a conflict "insoluble" by placing it more firmly at that level - for example, by "religionizing" or "ethnicizing" social economic or political conflicts.

Every violent conflict occurs on the basis of social structures, dependencies, social or political marginalization and - last but not least - as a result of unjust or perceived unjust distribution of social, economic or political resources.

Johan Galtung (1975:33) - the "inventor" of the concept of structural violence - has recorded the connection between violence and social structure as follows:

Violence

| personal | structural | [also referred to |
| (direct) | (indirect) | as social injustice] |

| absence of | absence of |
| personal violence | structural violence |

| or | or |

| negative peace | positive peace   [also referred to |
| | as social justice] |

Peace

Source: Galtung 1975:33.

As indicators of a social structure, peace researcher Johan Galtung (1978:15) has named two variables: First, inequality versus equality, and second, collectivism versus individualism (also: uniformity versus diversity). The first variable is especially crucial: extremely unequal societies can be collectivist societies (e.g. the former GDR, the Soviet Union, or today North Korea) as well as extremely individualistic societies (such as most Western countries, for example the U.S. or the U.K., but also Switzerland), but also countries with a strong

collective orientation with individual residuals, such as the countries of the Near and Middle East. Here, actual, effective inequality is usually less important than subjective, experienced or "felt" inequality, such as by members of the second generation of immigrants in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Europe who have been recruited for armed jihad and Islamist terrorism.

2.1 Functional and dysfunctional conflicts

Today, peace and conflict research has established that conflicts exist in all societies. Peace researchers today agree that the aim is not a conflict-free society, but rather to resolve conflicts as non-violently as possible, with appropriate conflict regulation and conflict management mechanisms.

Today's conflict research distinguishes four ideal-typical assessments of conflicts (cf. Bonacker and Imbusch 2010:76f.):

1) Conflicts as pathological phenomena: Conservative social theories in particular see social conflicts as a threat to social consensus and as a danger to existing hierarchies. In this context, social orders are understood as static systems of order. Conflicts are reduced to psychological or semantic problems and are understood and combated as pathological threats to the social order.

2) Conflicts as social dysfunctions: Here, although conflicts appear as a product of social structures, they are understood as a consequence of poor functioning or structural contradictions. Also in this view, conflicts are understood negatively and in deviation from a (societal) ideal state.

3) Conflict as a normal societal function or integration mechanism: Here, conflicts are understood as a "normal" phenomenon of societies. Conflicts have a society-stabilizing function and are channeled through appropriate mechanisms - e.g., federal systems. Conflicts can have a system-integrating or system-disintegrating function.

4) Conflicts as promoters of social or socio-cultural change. In this view, conflicts are even seen as productive, leading to social change, innovation or redistribution. Ralph Dahrendorf, for example, viewed conflicts positively, and for Marx and Engels, social conflicts were even central to the advancement of history.

This should make it clear: The understanding of conflict depends, on the one hand, on the political-ideological worldview and, on the other hand, on the political interests represented.

There are conflicts that are **functional** in relation to society, while other conflicts are **dysfunctional** to society. Functional conflicts are part of the normal course of a society and usually proceed according to certain rules of the game, which are sometimes institutionalized in the form of their own conflict resolution mechanisms. These include, for example, federal institutions for negotiating clashes of interests between different regions, population groups, parity commissions of employers' and employees' organizations, the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements, etc. In the medium or long term, this usually results in a kind of "enforced social consensus."

In contrast, dysfunctional conflicts tend to be destructive with regard to social, governmental or economic institutions, sometimes attacking them head-on. In extreme cases, dysfunctional conflicts can lead to anomie, i.e., to a complete breakdown of social trust and the dissolution of social values, norms and social structures. Examples of anomic situations include slums from which legitimate state authority - e.g., police, judiciary, etc. - has withdrawn and which are controlled or, better, terrorized by armed gangs.

A conflict can become functional or dysfunctional depending on the context and dynamics, but also depending on the existing conflict regulation mechanisms (see also ► Unit K17: "Culture, Conflict, and Violence" on the question of functional and dysfunctional conflicts). Instead of functional and dysfunctional ones, Jahn (2012:32) speaks of "creative, constructive conflicts that promote the progress of society and destructive conflicts that can destroy and annihilate people and societies and also irresponsibly damage and destroy nature and man-made things."

The very distinction between functional and dysfunctional conflicts indicates that conflict is not simply something disruptive, pathological, or to be eliminated. Rather, conflicts are present wherever people live, interact, and pursue their interests.

Accordingly, the aim is not to avoid conflict, but to deal with conflict in an optimal, fair and transparent way and to avoid uncontrolled escalation.

2.2   On the dynamics of conflicts

The following illustration shows the connection of the understanding of conflict as debate, game or fight with the corresponding escalation level of a conflict:

Conflict as		
Debate Controversy	**Game** Actions	**Fight** Blows
- The other party is seen as a partner who is to be convinced - The debate is conducted with words - The parties use theorical argumentation figures and psychological influence tactics	- The other party is considered as an opponent to be defeated. - The game is based on skillful moves, i.e. actions that are intended to corner the opponent and force him to surrender. - Not all means are allowed, the players respect certain rules of the game.	- The other party is regarded as an enemy who is to be personally hit, suppressed, harmed, and finally destroyed - In the fight every means is right, also violence
- The debate is only meaningful when there is a correct (or true) opinion, but the other side is either insufficiently informed or unable to think logically	- A game presupposes, as the parties are as possible equally strong - Between unequal parties it comes either to hidden actions or immediately to the fight	- A conflict takes the form of a fight when the other party is seen as the sole cause of the evil
- Conflict as a debate is over when one side has accepted the arguments of the other, i.e. has allowed itself to be convinced.	- Conflict as a game is over when it is clear (also by third parties) which side has won and which side has lost	- Conflict as a battle is over when one side has eliminated the other

1. Discussions Differences become conscious	2. Clashes Polarization begins	3. Hardening Positions cannot be reconciled	4. Coalition building Allies are recruited	5. Loss of face The other party is publicly dismantled	6. Threats Sanctions are threatened	7. Exclusion The other party is isolated as an "inhuman being"	8. Destruction strikes The other side is to be hit on the lifeblood	9. Total confrontation Destruction at any price, even that of self-destruction

Source: Berkel 2011:66.

As a rule, conflict is first expressed in words (discussions, debates), later it turns into actions, and in a third phase the actions acquire a violent component or become hurtful (threats, sabotage, bullying, violent acts, attacks, etc.).

2.3 On the problem of radicalization

Radicalization "Radicalization refers to a process in which the opposition between ideological positions and social groups intensifies as one or both sides increasingly relate to their imputed 'root' of the conflict. Radicalization often, but not necessarily, leads to violence." Source: Eckert 2012:7.

Roland Eckert (2012:10) has pointed out that radicalization processes reinforce the demarcation between groups and at the same time charge them with hostile feelings.

The following diagram shows the relationship between radicals and moderates of two opposing parties:
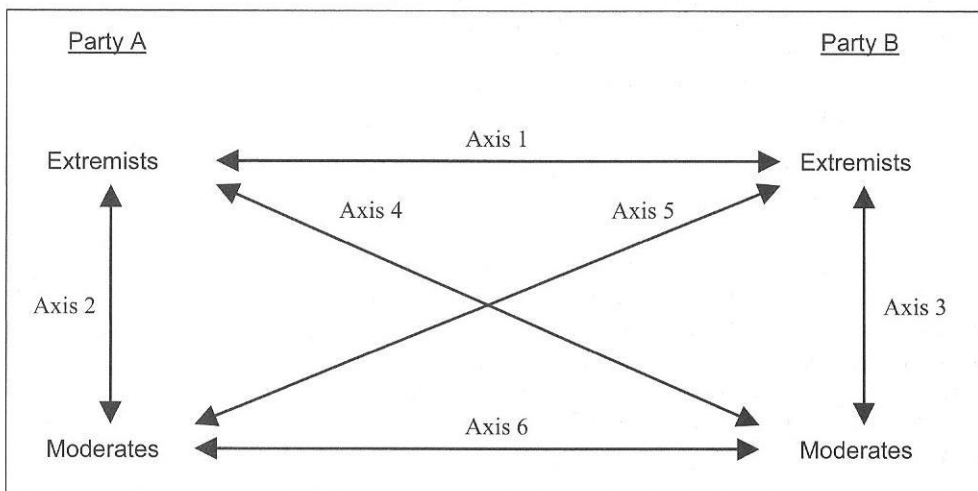

Figure 1: The Hexagon of Radical Disagreement
Source: Ramsbotham 2011:70.

It should be borne in mind that these relationships can have both a radicalizing and escalating effect, but also a de-escalating one, depending on how interventions are made with which actors and by which actors. It is also a question of which actors have greater

resources, such as finances, weapons, or-depending on that-people. In the Syrian civil war, for example, it became apparent that supplying weapons to the radical Islamists (e.g., the Islamic State) strengthened the extremists and reduced the moderate anti-Assad forces to insignificance. Conversely, strengthening moderate forces can de-escalate a conflict.

The role of the media in radicalization processes should not be underestimated. Through their selective portrayal and focus on shocking events, they create the platform and framework for publicly perceived radicalization in the first place, which is in turn reinforced by it. In a figurative sense, Wolfgang Borchert's sentence still applies: "Imagine there is a war and nobody goes": If extremist and terrorist acts or events no longer receive media attention - or at least not much greater attention than structural contexts or problems - it can be assumed that they will certainly decline. This is because the recruitment of terrorist movements takes place precisely through actions portrayed in the media - usually in terms of a successive escalation of violence. In addition, the fact that the media personalize events and developments more than ever means that, on the one hand, complex contexts are simply reduced to individuals and, on the other, these social contexts are expressed less and less. This in turn leads to a seemingly greater effectiveness - in the eyes of the disaffected - of violence and terror. Conversely, more complex, socio-political strategies are increasingly hidden, quite simply because they are very difficult to present in the media.

Eckert (2012:274) sees the following ways in which the rule of law can deal with radicalization processes:

- Instead of forced assimilation, respect for different affiliations;

- avoiding stereotypical attributions to others (such as "Islam"), but enforcing constitutional principles without compromise;

- sensitization also to "state-critical" or "anti-constitutional" groups;

- pay attention to possible "deprivation perceptions" of social disadvantage or cultural marginalization and be open to identity development of such groups;

- recognize nonviolent demonstration techniques;

- strongly promote prevention of violence and avoidance of violence;

- enforce respect for human rights and public safety; and

- promote reconciliation policies and opportunities.

It is astonishing that Eckert does not say a word about the role of the media as indirect multipliers of violence - via the dissemination of images of violence in a matter of seconds. Could it be that we have already become so accustomed to the images of violence that we have become not only indifferent but also insensitive to them? In any case, it would be urgent to reflect on the role of the media and its management of violence!

2.4   Mechanisms of conflict regulation

Depending on the socio-cultural context, there are different procedures for decision-making and conflict resolution (see also Jäggi 2009). Anne Isabel Kraus (2011:13) rightly states, "When different procedural norms and claims and the respective corresponding behaviors are mutually exclusive, there is ... a procedural conflict between them." This is especially true for highly divergent socio-cultural contexts or highly antagonistic intercultural conflict situations. It is arguably true - as Kraus (2011:15) suggests - "that there is neither an overarching standard nor a generally accepted mediation model for intercultural procedural conflict." Kraus (2011:15) concludes that "particular procedural conceptions that ... come into conflict with each other must first be treated as principally equal (pari)" (Kraus 2011:15) because there is no culturally overarching ethical justification for subjecting actors to foreign procedural principles that contradict their own normative conceptions. Kraus (2011:21) logically concludes, "For the mediation of intercultural procedural conflicts, we must ... develop new viable points of reference - both to find the right moral-theological positioning between universalism and particularism for this enterprise and, finally, to enable a contextually appropriate implementation of any minimal abstract standards." Thus ethics has finally arrived at the intercultural issue.

Kraus points out that in intercultural procedural ethics-which she believes has been "surprisingly little problematized" in international conflict resolution (Kraus 2011:21)-two main issues have contributed to the confusion: On the one hand, a blurring of factual and procedural issues, and on the other, the recognition "that procedural practices that seem foreign can also be practically meaningful and morally justified in their respective contexts of action" (Kraus 2011:22).

2.5   On nonviolent conflict resolution

By now a classic of nonviolent action and thus of nonviolent conflict resolution is Theodor Ebert (1970) with his book "Gewaltfreier Aufstand - Alternative zum Bürgerkrieg" (Nonviolent Uprising - Alternative to Civil War). In it, he presented a concept of nonviolent action based on the following three principles: first, the opponent must not be harmed; second, action should be "legitimized by the concrete utopia of a repression-free, social democracy" (Ebert 1970:34); and third, all participants should be offered the possibility of egalitarian participation. This kind of conflict behavior is simultaneously, political (not private!), ethical (not simply opportunistic-pragmatic) and efficient.

In the spirit of Gandhi, Ebert (1970:37) wanted to transform social resistance (against something) into "constructive action" (for something) out of the recognition that rejection of an existing injustice or problem will only lead to success if an alternative in terms of a new social settlement is developed at the same time.

Ebert distinguished three stages of nonviolent action, whose rejection of something existing had to be accompanied at the same time by the construction of something new: The first stage is represented by protest, which must turn into a "functional demonstration" for something, e.g., a change. As the second stage of resistance, Ebert named "legal noncooperation," which had to pass into (legal) role innovation, and as the third stage, Ebert described "civil disobedience," which had to lead into "civil usurpation," i.e., a takeover of institutions (cf. Ebert 1970:37). Ebert counted among these the creation of self-governing bodies, the creation of their own courts, economic institutions, etc.

This kind of escalating nonviolent conflict resolution also manifests itself, according to Ebert (1970:161), in "symbolic demonstrations of sentiment. These include, among other things, changes in clothing, hairstyle, etc. In this context, such methods can be used by everyone - from the flower power movement in the 1960s to the Salafist fundamentalists in the 21st century, for example, in the beards of men or the nikab of women.

In today's world, where the response to terrorist attacks is usually a military-police

reinforcement of repression, and nonviolent protests are limited to depositing flowers and candles at the site of violence and perhaps to a protest demonstration, it might be more promising to return to the methodology of nonviolent resistance developed by Ebert. All the more so because today the media possibilities are much greater.

3.   Control Questions

1.   Explain the term "conflict".

2.   When does a conflict exist according to Herzlieb?

3.   On what basis is every violent conflict based?

4.   What are conflicts of values?

5.   Explain Galtung's distinction between personal (physical) and structural violence.

6.   What are the differences between functional and dysfunctional conflicts?

7.   What does radicalization mean?

8.   What possibilities does the rule of law have to deal with radicalization processes?

9.   What role does the media play in the area of violence and radicalization?

10.   Why is procedural ethics important in conflicts between different socio-cultural contexts?

11.   Which two important basic ideas regarding non-violent resistance and conflict resolution does Ebert represent?

4.   Links

Definition Konflikt
http://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/Definition/konflikt.html

5.   Literature cited and further reading

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