

Readings in Peace & Conflict Studies



Edited by:

Kayode Soremekun, Ph.D

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Content

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Chapter Two: The Conceptual Analysis of Peace and Conflict (Bola Olanrewaju)

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Chapter Three: Types and Causes of Conflict

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Chapter Four: Life Cycle of Conflict

(Joshua Segun and Samuel Oni)

Chapter Five: The Sociological Dimension of Conflict

(Tayo George, Ph.D)

Chapter Six: Psychological Dimension of Conflict

(Agoha Ben)

Chapter Seven: Conflict Handling Techniques

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Section Four: Proactive Measures in Achieving Peace

Chapter Twelve: The Nexus between Communication and Peace (Lanre Amodu, Ph.D)

Chapter Thirteen: Preventive Mechanism and Early Warning (Agbude Godwyns and Bankole Olorunyomi)

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About The Editors

Professor Kayode Soremekun is a seasoned expert in Oil Politics, Foreign Policy and Conflict Studies. He was the immediate past Dean of the College of Development Studies at Covenant University. Professor Soremekun's experience as a university teacher began at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, from where he proceeded to chair the Department of Political Science at the University of Lagos) and has spanned over 30 years.

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Section One: Introduction

Chapter Twelve

The Nexus Between Communication and Peace

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Introduction

Communication is, perhaps, one of the most familiar words in modern times since everybody believes he/she communicates in one way or the other. In fact, the word is considered by many to be self-explanatory. Among the common usage of the word are mass communication, telecommunication and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Arguably, everyone is involved in or affected by one, if not all, of the examples given above. Nevertheless, it would still be misleading to assume that communication is clearly understood by all.

The concept of communication is similar to that of colours, which people are familiar with, but may have a problem defining if the need arises. Not only have people taken minimal time to examine the elements of communication, there is also the tendency to assign colossal responsibilities to it, such as maintaining, negotiating and restoring peace. Krauss & Morsella (2000, p.131) observe that communication is generally considered a solution to almost every social problem. They describe communication as the predictable remedy that is prescribed for conflicts ranging from neighbors' feud to nations' war. But what exactly is communication? What types of communication are there? What is the relationship between communication and peace? These questions will help us shape our discussion in this paper.

The Concept Of Communication

Communication in its simplest form is "the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver," (Baran, 2002, p.4). This definition is associated with the

political scientist, Harold Lasswell's, writings in which he states that a convenient way of describing communication is to ask the following questions: who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? and With what effect? According to Lasswell, communication can be described by explaining its process; a source must send a message through a medium to a receiver, thereby producing some effect (Baran, 2002, p.4).

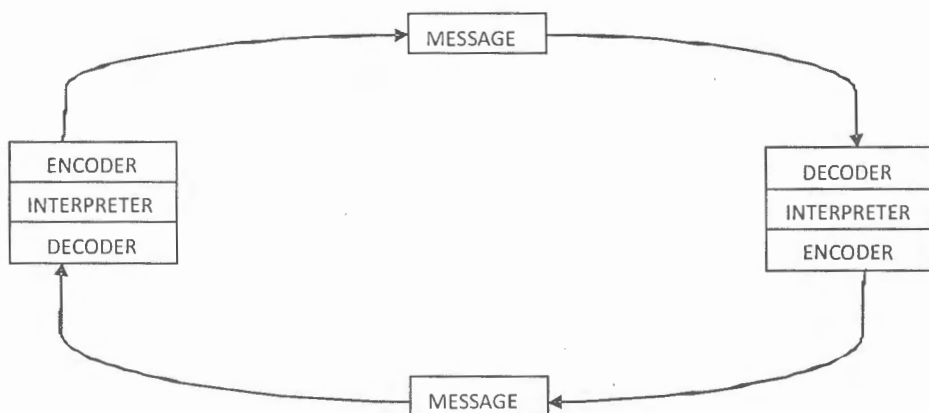
Baran (2002, p.5), however, considers the definition inadequate in spite of its straightforwardness. While it makes provision for a source to send a message to a receiver, it fails to factor in the possibility of the receiver not comprehending the message. If, for instance, a group of students attend a university public lecture on Bioinformatics, while the paper presenter may have successfully presented the information, students who are not science inclined may not have comprehend the subject. In a case such as this, it will be misleading to assume that communication has taken place.

Again, the simple definition of communication above presents the receivers as passively accepting the message without any feedback. Whereas, every message sent and received elicits a response, even if it is a meaningful silence. Therefore, the process of communication does not terminate with the reception of the message; rather, a response, which is also a message, is sent by the receiver back to the source, thereby causing an exchange of roles. Baran (2002, p.5) describes this as a "reciprocal and ongoing process with all involved parties more or less engaged in creating shared meaning."

Also in line with the reciprocal concept of communication, Hybels & Weaver (2001, p.6) state that communication is "any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings." They further explain that it is not limited to spoken and written words; rather, it also involves body language, personal mannerisms and styles that may add meaning in one way or the other. Baran (2002, p.5) makes reference to a valuable contribution by Wilbur Schramm, a

communication researcher, on the reciprocal nature of communication. Schramm used the original ideas of Charles E. Osgood, who was a psychologist, to develop a graphical representation of the concept.

Figure 1: Osgood and Schramm's Model of Communication



Source: Baran (2002, p.5)

The model depicts the communication process in which the source and receiver constantly exchange roles. A message is encoded by being transformed into signs and symbols that other participants are familiar with. This may include speaking, writing and filming a television programme or movie. This message is decoded when the receiver listens, reads or watches the information sent. The receiver, in turn, packages a feedback in the same manner it was received, which is encoding, and sends it to the source who also decodes it by interpreting the message, and the process goes on.

Schramm (1954), however, does not stop there. He observes that in a typical communication process, there is no 'original' source and receiver. He argues that during the process, participants are simultaneously the source and the receiver. It is difficult to identify the beginning of any communication. The fact that a participant starts a conversation does not make him/her the source; he/she may have started the conversation because of the facial expressions or body movement of the others. For instance, the fact that a teacher has prepared a lesson for a class does not make him/her the source of the communication; the presence of the students in class already communicates their willingness to learn.

Still exploring the idea of communication, Burgoon and Ruffner (1978) identify five attributes of human communication as transactional, affective, personal, instrumental and consummatory (as cited in Folarin, 2005, p.17). Here is a clearer explanation of them:

- a. Communication is transactional: this is because communication involves an exchange between the source and the receiver, causing them to constantly impact each other. Consequently, a change in one of the elements of communication leads to a change in the others. For instance, an insult from one of the parties involved in a communication process may result in a corresponding response from the other party, thereby changing the direction of the communication.
- b. Communication is affective: messages sent and received are emotion-laden. Every word, expression, gesticulation or symbol in communication conveys the emotion of the sender and creates a fresh emotion in the receiver. Sometimes, the emotion of the source is replicated in the receiver, while at other times, it generates an opposite reaction. In a case where a source expresses love towards the receiver, the reaction can be mutual or contrary. If the receiver also appreciates the source, the message of love replicates the same emotion, but if the receiver either sees the source as a 'mere' friend with whom no romantic feelings can be

- entertained, or the source is out rightly disliked, the emotion in the message will generate an opposite reaction.
- c. Communication is personal: though participants in a communication process may understand each other because of the shared codes of verbal or non-verbal symbols that are involved, further interpretation of the message depends on the personal meanings attached by each of the participants. Using the illustration above as an example, both parties may understand the subject and requirement of love, the difference is whether or not, for personal reasons, they see themselves ready or suitable for it.
 - d. Communication is instrumental: whether on the conscious or subconscious level, people tend to use communication as a tool for achieving their personal objectives. One of the major objectives that communication is used to achieve is control or influence on others- Politian try to influence citizens to vote, school managements try to influence students to comply with rules, students try to influence teachers to postpone tests, and they also try to influence their parents to send more money. All these and many more are achieved through communication. Hence, communication is instrumental to the fulfillment of people's ambitions.
 - e. Communication is consumatory: communication can also be engaged merely for the sake of deriving satisfaction from the process. Here, no 'higher purpose' is intended; participants are more interested in the entertainment function of communication. No deliberate effort is made to influence or control others, so, any effect that may occur is accidental.

The Concept Of Peace

Peace is one of the words that are hardly appreciated or even properly understood until their alternatives are considered. The alternative to peace that readily comes to mind is conflict or war. Hence, we shall define peace by first exploring the concept of conflict.

According to Schelling (1960), “conflict occurs when groups, goals, objectives, need or value clash, and aggression, although not necessarily violence, is a result” (as cited in Cunningham, 1998, p.5). This definition crystallizes the idea of incompatibility in the objectives of the parties involved in a particular situation. The inability or disinterest in reaching a compromise is what results in a conflict.

Donohue & Kolt (1992) also explain that conflict may arise when interdependent parties express their differences in the process of pursuing and achieving their needs and goals. Hence, it becomes impossible for there to be a co-existence of the differences without some adjustment, which neither of the parties may be interested in making. Note that for conflict to arise, there must be interdependence among parties and they must have divergent values or approaches to achieving their objectives.

A more advanced stage of conflict is crises, and Nkwoche (2005) describes it as “any event, issue occurrence or situation which constitutes a significant breach in the natural order of things and produces a disruptive force that can destroy...” (as cited in Nwanne, 2006, p.56). The event of a crisis and its aftermath usually cause significant damage to the parties involved (Barton 1993, cited in Adelabu, 2008, p. 619).

Consequently, we can safely say that conflict results when there is a breakdown in the relationship between certain parties who either want the same thing without the option of sharing, or who want different things when only one can be accommodated. Whether or not the situation degenerates into a crisis or war depends on the degree of the broken relationship.

Therefore, what is peace? Galtung (1969, p. 167) observes that few other words are often used and frequently abused as the word peace. According to him:

When efforts are made to plead almost any kind of policy-say technical assistance, increased trade, tourism, new forms of education, irrigation, industrialization, etc- then it is often asserted that that policy, in addition to other merits, will also serve the cause of peace. This is done regardless of how tenuous the relation has been in the past

or how dubious the theory justifying this as a reasonable expectation for the future.

Hence, Galtung (1969, p. 167) argue that any intention that is seemingly positive, not minding the selfish motive that may be behind it, is considered peaceful. Nevertheless, peace is still a unifying factor because it is hard for any party to a conflict to admit that they are all out against peace. Whether genuine or not, the word peace has a way of creating a feeling of hope and an anticipation for a better future.

Rourke (2008, p.28) observes that peace can mean different things depending on who is defining it. For instance, some feminists, theorists who advocate and struggle for equality for women (Fraer, 1999), argue that there are the masculine and feminine definitions of peace. A feminist scholar, Reardon (1990), suggests that the masculine perspective mostly sees peace as the absence of war, but she describes this as "negative peace." On the other hand, she explains that women think more in terms of "positive peace," which includes situations of social justice, economic equity and ecological balance, (as cited in Rourke, 2008, p.28). Our current study aligns more with the feminist perspective of peace since the absence of war does not necessarily mean that involved parties are at peace. War is perhaps the climax of a series of conflicting events, but it is not the only stage at which peace is threatened or absent. Nevertheless, to avoid the pitfall of having a definition that is too simplistic to be realistic or too complex to cater for mundane or day-to-day matters, we shall define peace as it relates to this study in communication. Therefore, peace is a state in which concerned parties allow reciprocal communication that encourages mutual respect and acceptance, and that reconciles their objectives.

Perception: The Bridge Between Communication And Peace

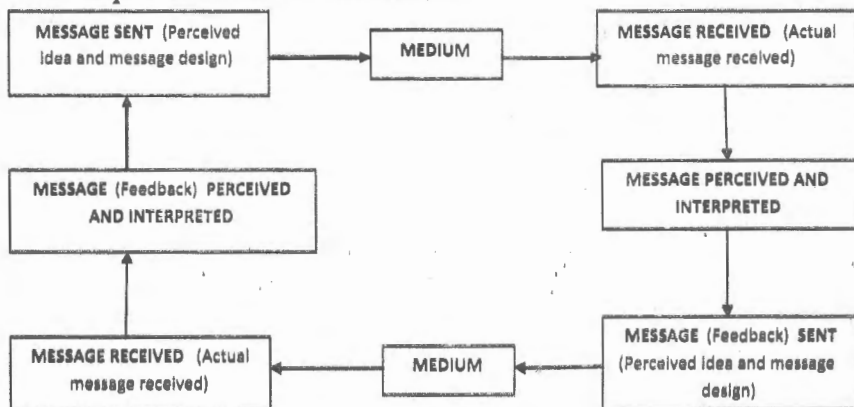
This study, so far, has defined communication and examined the process through which it is achieved. It has also examined the concept of peace by first considering the consequences of its absence. At this juncture, one may ask, "If communication is really transactional and both the source and the receiver

understand each other, should not peace be guaranteed? The obvious answer is no. Communication by itself cannot ensure peace because it is subjected to other factors, one of which is perception.

Perreault & McCarthy (2005) define perception as the way we gather and interpret information from the world around us. Perception qualifies communication; while communication is the process of sending and receiving information, perception is the way it is done. Hence, if the way is defective, the process will be too. It was mentioned earlier in this work that communication is affective and personal; this crystallizes the subjective nature of communication. Every message received is interpreted based on the emotions and personal ideals of the receiver, and this falls within the purview of perception.

According to Amodu (2006, p.151), "what you perceive is what you believe...if indeed communication is transactional in nature, and transactions are based on beliefs, and beliefs can be equated to perception, then communication and perception are directly related." He further proposes a model to explain the role of perception in the communication process, which can help us gain a better insight into how perception influences the extent to which communication can help to achieve peace.

Figure 2: Perceptual Communication Model



Source: Amodu (2006)

The model above illustrates the role of perception in communication. First, this model agrees with previous works that communication is a reciprocal process in which there is a constant exchange of roles (Baran, 2002; Folarin, 2005). Going further, the model shows that every message is designed through the perception of the sender. The word designed does not necessarily suggest that the message is deliberate; even non-verbal and reflex cues are also designed because they represent some symbols of communication. A source's perception naturally affects the message design, which has serious implications for peace. For instance, if a student is assigned the same hostel room with a 'rumored' thief, he/she would have already developed a perception of that other student, and it would naturally reflect in his/her conversations or the way valuable things will be protected.

The source's perception also determines the medium through which the message will be sent. Medium, as earlier established in this work, may be voice, behaviour, media, etc. No matter how subtle the source tries to be, the medium reflects the message. Hence, anger, for instance, tends to go with a raised voice. Perception generates emotions and the emotions are forced in to the medium.

Apart from cases in which messages are ambiguous or there is interference of noise, the receiver usually receives the exact information sent by the source. Amodu (2006, p. 152) explains that, if an article is published in a newspaper, the same text sent by the publisher is received by the reader except in the case of publication error. After the message is received, however, it is passed through the 'perceptual window' for interpretation. This is the stage at which the message is either interpreted correctly or wrongly. The perceptual window contains the sum total of the receiver's views (opinions formed from other people's judgment) about the source, the message and the medium. The intensity of the views determines how much of the actual message is passed through the window without alteration. After the message has been interpreted by the receiver, he/she designs and sends a

corresponding feedback to the source. While the feedback may be sent through the original medium used by the source, the receiver may also choose another medium that best communicates the emotion in his/her feedback. The source receives and interprets the feedback through the same processed earlier explained, and the communication continuum progresses.

Communication can help achieve or maintain peace if the parties involved are conscious of the salient role of perception in the process. No message exists in a vacuum; each message is a function of the circumstance that produced it. Hence, to foster peace, parties involved in any communication process should place as much priority on balanced perception of other parties as they place on the message.

Types Of Communication And Implication For Peace

Communication can be categorized according to the channels utilized. Of course, the audience determines the channel or medium, therefore, it is only logical that the more the audience size, the more elaborate the medium. For communication to help achieve peace, the audience and medium must be taken into consideration. Here, we shall examine three types of communication:

a. **Intrapersonal Communication:** this is reflective communication; it takes place within the communicator. According to Hybels & Weaver (2001, p.16), intrapersonal communication involves thoughts, feelings and the way we look at ourselves. Hence, the source and the receiver are the same person. Intrapersonal communication should, however, not be limited to internal communication because it is possible to speak audibly to oneself. Hence, in intrapersonal communication, the medium is the brain (or mind) where the thoughts are created, and the voice.

Hybels & Weaver (2001, p.16) again explain that our experiences determine how we 'talk' to ourselves. They also state that we can never look at ourselves without being influenced by our relationships with

others. Hence, our views of ourselves is a product of what others think of us, which explains why we tend to care about others' opinion of us.

When an individual perceives himself/herself to be disfavoured by others, there tends to be a conflict between his/her personal view of self and what others think. Hence, personal view of self must be reconciled with other people's views. While one may have no control over other people's opinion, it is possible to determine the extent to which such opinions affect one's self-image by selectively exposing oneself to external information (Folarin 2005, p.89).

- b. **Interpersonal Communication:** Baran (2002, p.6) describes this as a communication between two or a few people. It usually occurs in informal and unstructured settings (Hybels & Weaver, 2001, p.16), though it can also be formal, depending on the objective. It provides the greatest opportunity for feedback in terms of communication with other people. Interpersonal communication is germane to peaceful workplace, family-life and academic relationships, among others. Of course, most peacekeeping efforts in war prone countries are engaged at the interpersonal level. Peace treaties are signed on interpersonal platforms.
- c. **Mass Communication:** this is the broadest form of communication that exists. It involves "creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audience" (Baran, 2002, p.6). The messages of mass communication are highly structured and they are channeled towards large audiences that may number up to millions. (Hybels & Weaver, 2001, p.16). The technologies of mass communication are predominantly unidirectional, leaving little or no room for direct feedback. Baran (2002, p.7) describes it as delayed inferential feedback, since television executives and press editors, among others, must wait for a few days or weeks to receive feedback from their audiences.

The mass media are highly prized as far as public communication is concerned. All famous people and celebrities are 'made' by the media, or else, they would not be known outside their particular areas of activities. Once any subject becomes a media event, it catches the attention of the media's mass audience.

The concept of media event was first defined by Dayan and Katz (1992) while advancing their media event theory. Their work focuses on the impact that the modern television-based ritual has on media producers, the media and the public. By media producers, they mean prominent leaders of nations and leading personalities in science and religion; the media refer to television producers, journalists and directors involved in producing the event; and the public represents people whose access to the event is through their television screens.

Nossek (2008, p. 314) notes that Dayan and Katz base their work on the social-functional theory, which conceptualizes media event "as a ritual used by societies for self-mobilization and solidarity purposes and also that media events mark meaningful events in the life of their nation or civilization." Going by this definition, we can consider certain events in the political history of Nigeria as media events, such as the nation's independence in October 1960 and the latest transition to democratic rule in May 1999. In both cases (among several others), more people watched, listened to or read about the historical events than those who were physically present at the venues. This, nevertheless, did not undermine the participation of the "distant" audiences; they were also part of the history being made.

With the foregoing, it is needless to say that mass communication plays a major role in mass mobilization for peace. As can be observed in Nigeria, there are usually several advertorials during election periods to advocate for peace and to persuade youths to shun violence. Appeals were also

made to Nigerians to be security conscious and to embrace peace during the heat of Boko Haram attacks. These are examples of how the mass media can be used to mobilize citizens for peace.

Conclusion

Communication is a human activity that is indispensable. Even in the greatest efforts not to communicate lie clear messages of our intentions. To communicate effectively, parties involved must actively engage the perceptual process to ensure that messages sent are not only received correctly, but also that their interpretations correspond with the desired result. For communication to be employed for peace building purposes, it must not be abandoned to chance. Deliberate and strategic communication can help eliminate or at least reduce animosity.

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INDEX

A

- African Leadership Development Centre, vii
 Alma Mater, vii
 Angell, 1916, 5
 Al-Qaeda, 15
 Andeoni-Ogoni, 17
 Anifowose R. 1982, 23, 75
 Animasaun 2008:2), 27, 30
 Alonge 2005, 25
 Anderson and Taylor 2002, 38, 48, 49
 August Comte 1837, 38
 Aguleri and Umuleri clash, 41
 American revolution, 43
 Arewa, 44
 Apartheid Orchestrated terrorism, 44
 Afghanistan, 45
 Al-Qaeda insurgency, 45
 Adler 1929, 58
 Adolf Hitler 58, 68
 Allermeyer (1981) 68
 Albert 2001, 79, 83, 88
 Ali 2006, 79
 Additional Protocol 1977, 93
 Amnesty International 2002, 101
 Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), 112, 136
 Ago 2011, 112
 African Union (AU), 118, 147, 160
 Antarctic Treaty 1959, 121
 All sebrook 1986, 129
 Arend 1983, 135
 Abubakar 2004, 143, 145, 148
 Akindele 1990, 148
 Ayhan 2011, 165
 Adelabu 2008, 188
 Amodu 2006, 185, 186, 187
 Abebe 2006, 193

B

- Bansikiza (2004), 5, 9
 Barash and webel (2002), 14, 179, 184
 Berkowitz 1969, 22
 Byrne and Senchi 2009, 31
 Burtan 1987, 39

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Boko Haram, | 41, 43 |
| Bosnian genocide, | 43 |
| Burton's (1997), | 46, 76 |
| Bashir Assad, | 58 |
| Benito Musolini, | 68 |
| Bar-Tal 2000, | 75 |
| Brewer et al 2002, | 80 |
| Beijing Platform for Action 1995, | 96 |
| Burn 2005, | 98, 99 |
| Beltran and Freeman 2007, | 101 |
| Beraorita and Jackson 2001, | 113, 119 |
| Barcovitch 1991, | 127 |
| Bingham 1986, | 128 |
| Bailey 1982 | 130 |
| Browett 1983, | 131 |
| Bassey 2002, | 141, 142, 143 |
| Brown and Jenson 2009, | 159 |
| Bastian & Luckham 2003, | 168 |
| Burgoon and Ruffner 1978, | 181 |
| Barton 1993, | 183 |

C

| | |
|--|----------|
| Chancellor, | vi |
| Charles Korede Ayo, | vi |
| Conflict Studies, | vii |
| College of Development Studies, | vii |
| Covenant University, | vii, 39 |
| Conflict prevention mechanism, | 2 |
| Chaplin (1979; 109), | 8, 9 |
| Cold war, | 14 |
| Civil war, | 14 |
| Chafe 1994, | 27 |
| Coser 1968, | 28, 78 |
| Coup-de-tat, | 43 |
| Crider, Geothals, Kavanaugh & Solomon (183), | 64 |
| Coufoudakis 1976, | 69 |
| Camp David 1979, | 70 |
| Chaudhry et al 2011, | 77 |
| Carreti 2009, | 98, 106 |
| Connell 2000, | 99 |
| Carey and Torres 2010, | 101, 102 |
| Coller 2003, | 155, 202 |
| Curran and Woodhouse 2007, | 145 |
| Call 2004, | 157 |
| Church & Shouldice 2002, | 160 |
| Christie 2000, | 163 |

D

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Dr. David Oyedepo, | vi |
| Distinction, | vi |
| Dr. Sheriff f. Folarin, | vii |
| Dr. Daniel Gberevbie, | vii |
| Diplomacy, | vii |
| Deputy Director, | vii |
| Democratic Republic of Congo, | 15, 118 |
| Deutsch and Coleman 2000, | 28, 80 |
| Duvouet 2006, | 32 |
| Durham (1984), | 3, 9, 46 |
| Dim Odumegwu Ojukwu, | 68 |
| Doyle and Paludi (1998), | 97 |
| Druckman 1997, | 113 |
| Dixon 1996, | 127 |
| Diaconu 1983, | 135 |
| Daniel 1997, | 144, 147 |
| Deconing 2008, | 155, 158, 159, 168 |
| Dobbins et al 2005, | 156, 168 |
| Davies and Kaufman 2002, | 166 |
| Donohue & Kolt 1992, | 183 |
| Dayan & Katz 1992, | 189, 190 |
| Davies and Gurr 1998, | 199, 202 |

E

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Ethnic Nationalism and Conflict, | vii |
| Evil, | 13 |
| Efik-Ibibio Conflict, | 17 |
| Egba-Awori Clashes, | 17 |
| Eynikel and Ziaka 2011, | 41 |
| Ekwenife 1993, | 41 |
| Ethnic Racial Conflict, | 4 |
| Egyptian Revolution, | 43 |
| Egbesu Boys, | 44 |
| Enloe 199, | 94 |
| Erskine 2000, | 143 |
| ECOWAS Monitoring, Group (ECOMOG), | 147 |
| European Union (EU), | 147 |
| ECOWAS, | 147 |
| Evans 1993, | 158 |

F

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Faculty, | vi |
| Foreign policy, | vii |
| Forsyth (1990), | 8, 9 |
| Folarin 1997, | 16, 181, 186, 188 |
| Fulani-Birom Clash, | 17 |
| Fasoyin (1992), | 45 |
| Fink 1968, | 59 |
| Fidel Castro, | 68 |
| Francis 2006, | 75 |
| Faleti 2006, | 75, 77, 78 |
| Fayomi 2009, | 93 |
| Fisher 1990, | 111 |
| Filipov 2006, | 155, 159, 169 |
| Falk 2011, | 165 |
| Fraer 1999, | 184 |

G

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Gender Violence, | 2 |
| Galtung (1967:12), | 4, 5, 9, 157, 183 |
| Gombe 1984, | 41 |
| Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) | 42 |
| Genocide, | 42 |
| Genova Protocol 1949, | 93 |
| Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), | 101, 102 |
| Gulliver 1979, | 113 |
| Goldberg, Sander and Rogers 1992, | 114 |
| General Assembly Resolution 2625 (xxv), | 121 |
| Gberevbie 2012, | 142 |
| Goulding 1993, | 144 |
| Ghani et. all 2007, | 160 |
| Gurr 1996, | 199 |

H

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Hobbesian, | 6 |
| Hartmann (1973), | 6 |
| Hobson 2006:1902, | 21 |
| Hislop 2012, | 41 |
| Hausa/Fulani, | 41 |
| Heater Zarka (2007), | 47 |
| Haralambos and Holborn (2008), | 47 |
| Hilary Clinton, | 59 |
| Hans et al 2012, | 77, 80, 82 |
| Holvik & Meijer 1994, | 79, |
| Human Rights Watch 2008, | 100 |

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Hollander 1996, | 101 |
| Holsti 1966, | 111 |
| Henchel 2007, | 118 |
| Horowitz 2000, | 165 |
| Hybels. & Weaver 2001, | 179, 188, 189 |
| I | |
| International Relations, | vi |
| International Office, | vii |
| Idealists, | 5 |
| Intra-Personal, | 7 |
| Inter-personal, | 7 |
| Itsekiri-Urhobo-Ijaw Conflict, | 17 |
| Ife-Modakeke, | 17, 41 |
| Imobighe's 1993, | 39, 51 |
| Iranian Revolution, | 43 |
| International Development Centre 2001, | 141 |
| International Middle East Peace, Research Center (IMPR) 2012, | 162, 163, 164, 165, 167 |
| J | |
| Jeong, 2000, | 14, 15 |
| Jost & Sidanus 2004, | 68, 69 |
| James 1990, | 144 |
| Johnson 2004, | 164 |
| K | |
| Kayode Soremekun, | vii |
| Karl Marx (1818-1883), | 39, 47, 48 |
| Kano, | 41 |
| Kaduna, | 41 |
| Kosovo rebellion, | 43 |
| Kerchoff & Davis 1962, | 64 |
| Kelman 2002, 1999, | 69, 71 |
| Kriesberg 1973, | 78 |
| Kiberly Thaidon and Kelly Phenicie (2009), | 92 |
| Korablum 2003, | 93, 95 |
| Kelly 2000, | 102 |
| Kolb 1983, | 118 |
| Kressel and Prutt 1989, | 119, 127 |
| Kleiboer 1996, | 119, 120 |
| Krauss & Morsella 2000, | 178 |
| L | |
| League of Nations, | 5 |
| Liberalists, | 6 |
| Lamb 2008, | 16, 17 |

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Lenin 1917, | 20, 21 |
| Lund 1997: 2, | 28, 31 |
| Lederach 2005, | 43, 31, 159 |
| Libyan Conflicts, | 45 |
| Lepird et al (no date), | 47 |
| Leon Festinger 1957 | 64 |
| Luyken 2012, | 70 |
| Lall 1966, | 112 |
| La Tour et al 1972, | 128 |
| Lerner 2011, | 164, 165 |

M

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Management Team, | vi |
| Mass Communication, | vi, 2 |
| Multi-disciplinary, | 1 |
| Mapel, 1996, | 55, 6, 9 |
| Morgenthau, 1949 | 6, 8, 9 |
| Marxists | 7 |
| March and Simon (1958) | 8 |
| Mitchell (1981:18) | 8 |
| Morell 2009, | 17 |
| Miller 1948, | 22, 62 |
| Mc Ginnis 1999, | 29 |
| Mend, | 44 |
| Max Weber, | 47 |
| Marshall 1998, | 49, 154 |
| Muammar Gaddafi, | 58, 68 |
| Maslow (1970), | 62 |
| Mc Candless 2007, | 75 |
| Moser and Clark 2001, | 94, 120, 103 |
| Memory of Silence 1999, | 101 |
| Moore 1986, | 117 |
| Mupedziswa 2009, | 142 |
| Mc Gowan 2006, | 142, 143 |
| Momah 1993, | 147 |
| Murphy 2008, | 147 |
| Malitza 2004, | 148 |
| Maiese 2003, | 156 |
| Montville 1990, | 166 |
| Minear and Chilia 1992, | 170 |
| Mwanasali 2006, | 201 |

N

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Negative Peace, | 4 |
| Nwolise (2003), | 8, 27, 141, 144, 146 |
| Nicholson (1992), | 14 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Nikolajeva 2005, | 16 |
| Nnoli 1998, | 27, 143 |
| Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), | 39 |
| Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), | 39 |
| Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), | 39 |
| Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), | 39 |
| Napoleon Bonaparte, | 58, 68 |
| Nanda & Warms 1998, | 62 |
| Newcomb (1961), | 64 |
| New York Times 1979, | 70 |
| Nkwoche 2005, | 183 |
| Nwanne 2006, | 185 |
| Nossek 2008, | 190 |
| O | |
| Obafemi Awolowo University, | vii |
| Oil Politics, | vii |
| Oyesola, 2005:105 | 8, 32 |
| Oodua People's Congress (OPC), | 15, 44 |
| Oakland 2005, | 20 |
| Otite 2001:2, | 28, 76, 77 |
| Omoluabi 2001:4, | 30 |
| Ojiji 2006, | 75, 76, 78, 80, 82 |
| Onigbinde 2008, | 141 |
| Osgood 1985, | 143, 180 |
| Okeke 2008, | 145 |
| Orr 2004, | 161, 168 |
| OECD 2001, | 161 |
| Ousman 2011, | 193, 194, 195, 196 |
| P | |
| Political Science | vi |
| Psychology | vi |
| Publishers | vi |
| Politics, | vii |
| Public Administrator Expert, | vii |
| Prism, | 2 |
| Peace, | 4 |
| Plato (1941), | 5 |
| Pythagorean Philosophers, | 5 |
| Prophet Mohammad, | 41 |
| Parsons 1947, | 49 |
| Pondy (1967), | 59 |
| Para 190 (a), | 96 |
| Princen 1992, | 116 |
| Peace building Commission 2007, | 158, 159, 168 |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Pouligny 2005, | 168 |
| Peck 1999, | 169 |
| Perreault & McCarthy 2005, | 185 |
| R | |
| Relevance, | vi |
| Richard (2008), | 4, 5, 10 |
| Realists, | 6 |
| Ross 1993, | 16, 141, 142 |
| Ralph Lemkin (1994) | 42 |
| Revolution, | 42 |
| Richerson & Boyd 2005, | 60, 61 |
| Rosenwein 1998, | 61 |
| Robardick & Dentan 1987 | 62 |
| Rashid 2012, | 80 |
| Rahim and Bonoma 1979, | 80, 81, 111 |
| Rehn and Sirleaf 2002, | 102 |
| Raiffa 1982, | 113 |
| Repertoire of the practice of the security Council 1998, | 157 |
| Reilly 2003, | 168 |
| Rourke 1969, | 184 |
| Reardon 1990, | 184 |
| S | |
| Sun Tzu, | 1 |
| Siamese Twins, | 1 |
| Sociological Contextualization, | 2 |
| Scherrer, 2007, | 5 |
| Sabine, 1973, | 5 |
| State of nature, | 6 |
| State of war, | 6 |
| Secondergaard, 2008, | 1, 6, 10 |
| Security, | 6 |
| Stedman (1991: 269), | 8, 10 |
| Stagner (1967: 16), | 8, 10 |
| St. Augustine (1950), | 13 |
| Swanstron and Weissmann 2005, | 9, 31, 32, 78 |
| Salem 1993, | 39 |
| Sharia (Islamie Law), | 41 |
| Saki (Oyo State), | 41 |
| Syrian Civil war, | 45 |
| Sudan Internal Conflict, | 45 |
| Savillo 2002, | 61 |

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Salovey & Mayer 1990, | 66 |
| Sani Abacha, | 68 |
| Stephen 1998, | 121 |
| Sandole 1987, | 142 |
| Sollenberg & Wallensteen 1996, | 154 |
| Spence 2001, | 158 |
| Smith 2003, | 159, 169 |
| Smuts 1987, | 159 |
| Swarbrick 2007, | 160 |
| Shea 2000, | 163 |
| Schramm 1954, | 181 |
| Schelling 1960, | 183 |
| Souare 2007, | 193 |
| T | |
| Ted Gurr | 1 |
| Tranquillity | 4 |
| Tiv-Jukum Debacle, | 17 |
| Tucker-Lad, 2013, | 23 |
| Terrorism, | 42 |
| Turshan 2001, | 103 |
| Tourval and Zartman 1980, | 121, 123 |
| Tarekgh 2005, | 154 |
| Tschirgi 2004, | 155, 156, 157, 159, 167 |
| U | |
| University Platform, | vi |
| University of Lagos, | vii |
| University of Ibadan, | vii |
| University of Ife, | vii |
| United Nations Organization, | 5, 97, 112, 118 |
| United States of America, | 14 |
| Union of Soviet, | 14 |
| Umuleri-Aguleri | 17 |
| UNPP 2006, | 102 |
| Ury et al 1993, | 115 |
| Uvin 2002, | 154, 170 |
| V | |
| Vice-Chancellor, | vi |
| Visibility, | vi |
| Von Clausewitz, | 1 |
| Violence and Politics in Nigeria (1982), | 14 |
| Van and Vlug 1996, | 201, 202 |

About the Book

The book represents another attempt to enrich the literature of peace and conflict studies. It attempts this by the thematic approach, which will aid the teaching and learning of basic concepts, theories and issues in peace and conflict. Specifically, the book constitutes an introductory text for the teaching of peace and conflict studies in Nigerian higher institutions.