POLI 358
CONFLICT AND SOCIETY IN AFRICA

SESSION 7 : CULTURE AND CONFLICTS IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES

Lecturer: Dr. Seidu Alidu

Contact Information: smalidu@ug.edu.gh /seidualidu@gmail.com

Session Overview

Culture is particularistic and that makes it unique wherever it is manifested. Long associated with the discipline of Anthropology, culture has now been adopted by other disciplines to explain phenomenon that occurs in the field and conflict resolution is one of them. The causes, as well as the resolution of contemporary conflicts are explained by, and to some extent influenced, by culture. Therefore the role of culture in conflict resolution is so crucial and this session will focus on analyzing the role and responsibility of culture in attending to conflict.

Largely, analysis in this session will focus the universalistic claims of culture in relation to the localized understanding of the same concept; as well as the implication of this conceptualization to the universal conflict resolution mechanisms applicable everywhere compared to the emphasis on cultural relativity assumptions that limit mechanisms to the appropriate context.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in this session are:

- Topic 1: **NATURE OF CULTURE**

- Topic 2: **CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE IN CONFLICT**

- Topic 3: **ROLE OF CULTURE IN CONFLICT**

- Topic 4: **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Reading materials

- Barash, D.P. and Webel, C.P. (eds.) (2009) *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage publication

- Avruch, K. (1999) *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, Washington, USIP Press

- Woodhouse, T. and Duffey, T. (2000) *Peacekeeping and International Conflict Resolution*, New York: UNITAR-POCI

- Lederach, J. P. (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington DC: USIP Press

- Lederach, J. P. (1995) *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, New York: Syracuse University Press

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Learning objectives

At the end of the session, students should be able to:

- Understand what culture is and its role in peace and conflict studies
- Understand the broader categorization of culture vis-a-vis conflict studies
- Appreciate how this distinction is individually represented in the literature
- Become familiar with the enabling and constricting effects of culture to conflict resolution
- Appreciate the policy implications of the culture to conflict resolution

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Topic one

NATURE OF CULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

NATURE OF CULTURE

Culture has been long associated with the discipline of Anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Sewell, 1999; Brumann, 1999). However, over the years other disciplines including Peace Studies has since adopted Culture in the explanation and resolution of conflicts. Generally, Culture is seen as an embodiment of all aspects of the life of a person. This understanding makes a one-size-fits-all definition rather cumbersome since there different lifestyles and cultures.

Avruch (1998) develops two orders of culture in attending to conflict resolution:

➢ The generic culture (an adaptive attribute of homo sapiens; something everyone in the human species have)

➢ The local culture (rather complex mappings or systems of meanings that are shared and jointly created by people in social groups)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

NATURE OF CULTURE

Both orders identified by Avruch are important to conflict resolution and ignoring either could lead to a simplistic perceptions that could negatively affect resolution efforts.

Avruch highlights two ways in which conceptions of culture could be inadequate and affect conflict resolution strategies including:

- ➢ Oversimplification that ignores its complexity, including the assumptions that culture is homogenous, uniformly distributed or it is custom
- ➢ If it is connected to a political or ideological agenda

Topic Two

CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE IN CONFLICT

CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE

Culture is conceptualized differently in conflict resolution terms. These conceptualizations have great impact on conflict resolution and are represented below:

➢ Avruch and Black (1991) distinguish between "**enthoconflict**" and "**ethnopraxe**"

➢ Avruch and Black (1998) further distinguish between "**emic**" and "**etic**" approaches

➢ Lederach (1995) discusses "**prescriptive**" and "**elicitive**" approaches

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Topic Three

ROLE OF CULTURE IN CONFLICT

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

ROLE OF CULTURE IN CONFLICT

Culture is ofetn ignored during conflict resolution with the assumption that it is outmoded. However, Raymond Cohen (1991) argues that conflicts involves human beings and their relationship to one another and human beings are cultural beings. He further argues that the more emotive, political and public an issue could be, the more likely cultural effects will be felt.

The role of culture in conflict resolution is therefore not limited to:

➢ Help in identifying the source of conflict and the cultural ways of the combatants
➢ Understanding the conflict from the perspective of the culture of the feuding parties
➢ Designing and making use of the cultural norms and mores of the people in resolution process
➢ Empowering the native terms and traditional institutions in this effort
➢ Systematizing data on different cultural beliefs for the purpose of conflict resolution
➢ Projecting the domain, categories and way of life of indigenous people

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Topic Four

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The following policy implications are key:

- ➢ Formalizing cultural institutions and practices
- ➢ Global acceptance and legitimizing culturally specific conflict resolution strategies
- ➢ Guarding against cultural stereotyping and over-simplification
- ➢ Deconstruction of cultural perceptions and misperceptions
- ➢ Integrating culture as a key component of conflict resolution

References

- Barash, D.P. and Webel, C.P. (eds.) (2009) *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage publication

- Avruch, K. (1999) *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, Washington, USIP Press

- Woodhouse, T. and Duffey, T. (2000) *Peacekeeping and International Conflict Resolution*, New York: UNITAR-POCI

- Lederach, J. P. (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington DC: USIP Press

- Lederach, J. P. (1995) *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, New York: Syracuse University Press