

“Is conflict always bad? Is development always good?”

Conflict has been defined as two or more groups with the means to fight. “The means to fight” is a critical element of conflict without funding or weapons, there is simply tension. Development has been defined as issues of underdevelopment such as poverty, oppression, lack of rights or privileges. Before this class, I believed that conflict was bad and equated to destruction and I believed development was good because it implied progress. I have since learned conflict and development are interconnected by the very nature that one will cause the other through violence, war, intervention and aid. Conflict can lead to development and development can lead to conflict. That being said, not all conflict is necessarily bad and not all development is necessarily good.

Civil war violence is a conflict that seems bad but can be good. Robert Collier’s article “The Bottom Billion,” argues that civil wars are so damaging that it creates traps for countries to remain in constant conflict. Civil wars force economic growth to slow and do not allow society to develop or progress as it could. In this regard, civil wars are bad. Collier proposes that international intervention is necessary to fix the problem. He states that investment in the infrastructure and economy of underdeveloped countries will help break the cycle of conflict. It is good when civil wars are resolved by correcting the causes and issues of the conflict. So while civil wars seem bad because of the violence, the conflict and opposition is necessary to create solutions.

“New wars” is a term coined by Mary Kaldor to describe post-Cold War conflicts taking place in the Global South. Kaldor’s theory is that there has been a dramatic shift in the way wars are fought in the 21st century. She believes that wars are now fought internally within a single country by private actors with ideological motives instead of political motives. She believes the

militias have a decentralized power structure and she highlights that these conflicts happen in weak states. Though these types of war are not actually new, Kaldor's classification is important because it allows for more specific, and accurate analysis. These "new wars" seem bad and they are. There are massive civilian casualties and refugee displacements. Also a rise in crimes such as rape, robbery and looting, especially by the militia foot soldiers. The looting is often used to finance the war which is bad along with the other crimes because it leaves a wake of destruction that is much harder to repair when the fighting is over.

Conflict intervention in underdeveloped areas is not always a positive solution. In theory, intervention should be by an impartial third party who can help mediate disputes and foster cooperation. In the early 2000's, the United Nations intervened in the gang violence which was occurring in the slums of Port au Prince. The intention was to slow the violence and crime, creating safer areas. However, in this instance, the UN mission was more damaging than helpful to the civilians of Port-au-Prince because the UN used violence to counter the violence and ended up killing innocent men, women, and children in the crossfire. The damage of this mission is twofold. Firstly, the loss of human life is catastrophic. The loss of a family member can impact income, security, and opportunity. In "It Stays With You" a documentary about Haiti, a young woman who explains that her father's death impacted her life in that she was not able to finish school or get a job. Then at a young age, she had children who she could not support. Her father's death derailed her life. Secondly, the United Nations looked brutish and incompetent which is damaging to their reputation as a peace-keeping, governing organization.

Humanitarian aid is believed to be a good thing. It is supposed to be given by an outside agency or party to help citizens or refugees reconstruct their lives and communities. Aid is supposed to be based on principles of impartiality. The truth is that humanitarian aid can have

positive and negative effects. By providing the people with medical help or food or shelter, it can also be exploited to feed the conflict. The money from aid funds can end up in the hands of those causing the conflict or need for aid. For example, during the civil war in Sierra Leone, rebel groups in need of money and resources, began misappropriating the aid sent. The rebels escalated the violence by killing civilians by dismemberment or decapitation to attract more international attention. Because of the attention, more money and other assistance was delivered to the profiteering rebels. Therefore, humanitarian aid can be both good and bad.

There is danger in making generalizations about conflict or development. As we learned the different theories this semester, the consistent critique was oversimplification or “Westerncentrism” of conflict and development. While these criticisms are not the same thing, they present a bias on the study. The theories ignore the complexity and erase nuances of the societies studied to make their point. In making assumptions that conflict is inherently bad or that development is inherently good, it forces debate to be about how bad or good the two issues are rather than whether or not they are actually bad or good.

In conclusion, the close relationship between conflict and development creates circumstances for expectations to be defied. Conflict is bad, but can have positive effects. Development is good, but it can damage things and those closest to the issue. The biggest takeaway from this course should not be whether or not conflict is bad or development is good, it should be each conflict and each developmental issue should be analyzed and judged based on the merits of the individual situation.