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Abstract

The field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) was launched in the mid-twentieth century with revolutionary aspirations for explaining, describing and understanding protracted violent conflicts. The field's architects called for inquiry into the "whole person" of conflict actors that required inquiry into the social, psychological and political spheres of their lives. But the proposed research perspectives for carrying out such inquiry were devoid of revolutionary prescription. Regarding such perspectives, they set the stage that continues to this day for disciplinary conservatism by invoking research traditions from the positivist social sciences and from the interpretative social sciences. A third research tradition that underpins certain areas of inquiry in PCS is Phronesis research, according to which the social sciences are fundamentally pragmatic endeavors that are organized around strategies to address pressing social and political challenges of society. Yet, importantly, Phronesis research has garnered little theoretical attention among conflict analysts. No conflict analyst has ever explicitly cited Phronesis as a basis of their research practice.

With this article we offer the first theoretical reflection of Phronesis research in PCS. From this perspective PCS constitutes forms of research praxis, that is, an objective inquiry into the critical conditions—personal, social, and political—for the liberation of conflict actors from the internal drives and external forces that lead to mass violence. Genocide Studies serves as a prototype of such praxis. After providing critical remarks about positivist and constructivist research traditions in the social sciences (section 1), we offer a short genealogy of social science as praxis, including the contributions of Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School (section 2). We then present the defining elements of Phronesis research in the social sciences generally (section 3). Such elements are realized in the research praxis of Genocide Studies (section 4).

Keywords: *Peace and Conflict Studies; Conflict Praxis; Genocide Studies; Critical Theorists*

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Daniel Rothbart and Douglas Irvin-Erickson

Why does mass violence occur between nationalities, religious communities, and racial groups? What are the mechanisms, modes of interaction and processes that drive groups towards such violence? And what are the consequences for the conflict groups and for others who are engulfed in the carnage? These pressing questions motivate the work of analysts in the field of peace and conflict studies (PCS), a field that offers inquiry into the preconditions, characteristics, and consequences of large-scale violent conflict towards the goal of fostering peaceful relations among conflicting groups. The precise nature of such inquiry is neither simple nor singular. PCS draws upon a multiplicity of methods, techniques and heuristics that show striking affinities to other social scientific subjects. The precise nature of inquiry in PCS represents the primary subject matter of this article.

In particular, we probe its deep meaning that underpins the surface of specific research practices, techniques and heuristics. Like analytical excavators, we move beneath researchers' behaviors to examine underlying assumptions that tend to be accepted by analysts tacitly as a matter of course. These assumptions typically include three sorts of philosophical commitments: (1) ontological commitments regarding the nature of conflict, conflict dynamics, protracted violence and peace; (2) epistemic commitments regarding the criteria for acquiring genuine knowledge of categories; and (3) normative commitments about the moral underpinnings, if any, of such knowledge acquisition. The obvious fact that such commitments are contestable, as we show in detail below, does not undermine their centrality as guiding the techniques, methods, and practices of conflict researchers.

Logical positivism and social constructivism are two dominant research traditions that underpin an enormous body of research of PCS. From its formative days in the mid-20th century, the field's founding figures drew upon the positivist conception of social science, with its primacy given to methods of rational epistemology. Such a conception was castigated later by many conflict analysts who found solace in the interpretative sciences, as exemplified by anthropological inquiry into the cultural context of conflict. It is hard to find an article published in the last 20 years in *Journal of Conflict Resolution (JCR)* or *Journal of Peace Research (JPR)* that does not fall into one of these two camps, although *JPR* has remained dedicated to sustaining a rich conversation on the political philosophy of peace (e.g., Millar, 2021).

Yet, we must avoid overstating the dominance of these two research traditions, since both fail to capture bodies of research guided by an alternative principle—that such research is motivated, shaped, driven by, and defined as research praxis. Such praxis is designed to liberate population groups from conditions, forces, and mechanisms that render them vulnerable to being targeted or themselves committing various forms of violence. Based on this conception of PCS, the empirically grounded theories of peace and conflict are inextricably linked to the normative enterprise of undermining the precarity of certain population groups, freeing them from the preconditions—social, psychological, political, and/or historical—that generate their vulnerability and fostering among all conflict-actors a commitment to the humanity, and human rights, of all peoples.

We argue below that the notion of emancipatory praxis represents a defining, yet tacit, operational principle of certain domains of inquiry in PCS. This argument is not a repetition of the well-worn theme that conflict resolution practices *per se* constitute forms of praxis. Such a theme has been advanced widely by scholar-practitioners in this field. Rather, we argue that

empirical research for certain domains of PCS is conceived as emancipatory praxis. Such praxis draws upon a conception of the social sciences as phronesis research, which has a long tradition of intersecting empirically rich theories with normative commitments for addressing a society's social and political conflicts. Although exhibiting affinities to positivist social science and social constructivism, phronesis research represents a well-worn paradigm in the history of social scientific research that cannot be reduced to the other two research traditions. The conception of PCS as research praxis is theoretically and pragmatically situated within the phronesis paradigm. We argue that genocide studies represents a prototype of such praxis in PCS, in terms of which its researchers examine, expose, and reveal the preconditions for genocidal violence towards the emancipation of certain vulnerable population groups from the threats of such violence.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 provides critical remarks about the two dominant research traditions of logical positivist and social constructive social science with PCS. In section 2 we offer a short genealogy of research praxis of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists, which is followed in section 3 by three essential elements that, in effect, define the notion of a praxis-oriented social science. These three elements are then applied in section 4 to the field of genocide studies, which is intended to illustrate the currency of research praxis in PCS.

This article represents the first explicit examination of phronesis research in PCS. With this reflection we seek to foster debate about the philosophical underpinnings of PSC and its relations to general inquiry in the social sciences.

Research Preconceptions, Practice and Praxis

The field of conflict analysis launched in the mid-20th century with a revolutionary spirit to overthrow the perspective of classical realism on matters of war and peace. In place of classical realism, conflict analysts advanced the so-called whole person perspective that draws upon findings from social psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and the burgeoning field of peace studies. Yet, the revolutionary spirit exhibited during those heady days did not extend to the field's research methodologies. Since its formation, the field has exhibited a disciplinary conservatism regarding the standards, criteria, and methods for sound conflict research. As the field's founding figures formulated the nascent elements of conflict theories, they drew heavily upon norms of positivist social science. This reliance shows affinities to sociological explanations of group conflicts that can be traced back, at least, to Émile Durkheim (1897) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), two of the founders of modern sociology whose works represent to this day a pillar of conflict theory in sociology. The academic movement of logical positivism gained prominence with a group of philosophers and scientists in Vienna in the 1920s and 1930s. Known as the Vienna Circle, these scholars sought to advance academic programs that centered on objective epistemology in which sensory experience and logical/mathematical forms constitute the foundation of all rational sciences. By the 1940s, this movement swept through many leading academic programs in the United Kingdom, North America, and the Scandinavian countries. The legacy of this movement can be found in the research methodologies of many social scientific disciplines. As practiced in political science, experimental psychology, and economics, positivist-oriented social sciences operate in a research

space of empirical data, hypothesis formation, experimental tests, and theory confirmation or falsification.

Largely through this methodological conservatism—the fundamental reliance on research methodologies of sociology and political science for example—*JCR* and the *JPR* have become two of the most prestigious positivist political science and sociology journals in the world, with high rankings on all the important academic journal citation indexes. As such, the journals helped establish conflict resolution and peace studies, respectively, as notable subfields in any number of social sciences disciplines.

Yet, this legacy of logical positivism for PCS has not resulted in the universal commitment to a single set of positivist-oriented research norms. While retaining the twin epistemic pillars of empirical data and logical/mathematical forms, certain research institutions deployed their own formulation of research aims, assumptions, and methodologies. This diversity is evident in attempts to measure violent conflicts. Even for researchers engaged in quantitative analysis, no single data source, metric for merging data, or method of regression analysis captures the full breadth of methodologies deployed in research institutions engaged in PCS. (For an excellent analysis of this variability, see Ramsbotham et al., 2016, pp. 68-109.) Such diversity is reflected in the following research reports: “Correlates of War” (Singer & Small, 1972); Armed Conflicts Data Base (Gleditsch & Wallenstein, 2001); Minorities at Risk (2009); and Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2014). The data-rich graphs, models, charts, and maps from Uppsala Conflict Data Program offer a treasure trove of empirical findings about violent conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives globally and, in particular, countries.

Of course, positivist social science is not the only guiding paradigm in PCS. The social constructivist paradigm draws upon various research traditions, including hermeneutics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, narratology, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis. Rather than investigating the brute facts of social phenomena, constructivists explore the meaning-making processes and products towards the goal of exposing culturally sanctioned constructed forms, such as interpretative repertoires, that actors deploy consciously or unconsciously before, during, and after their social interactions.

There is an important theoretical pillar that runs through the history of conflict research: that conflict is inherently socially constructed in human societies, since the determining variables that push people towards cooperation versus conflict, or towards resolving their conflicts destructively instead of constructively, are contingent upon the particular social constructs that define social relationships at any given moment. Discourse, narratives, imagery, icons, conceptual frames—these constitute the substance of the conflictual relationships and interactions. The claim of moral neutrality advanced by positivist-oriented sciences is unsustainable for social constructivists, since the genuine understanding of a community's meaning-making processes cannot be cleansed entirely of the researchers' value commitments.

Our argument is not whether conflict and conflict resolution are socially constructed; the field has largely spoken that it is. Our argument, instead, has to do with the kinds of research that is conducted about the social constructions of conflict and conflict resolution. Consider for example the following definitions of conflict that can be found in texts commonly assigned in undergraduate or graduate courses:

- Conflict is the perception amongst two or more parties that their interests are mutually exclusive (Pruitt & Kim, 2004).

- Conflict is a goal-incompatibility typically as adversaries perceive a major threat to something valued (Mitchell, 2014, p. 24).
- Conflict is the fundamental disagreement between two parties, of which a dispute is one possible outcome, as well as conciliation, conflict avoidance, or capitulation (Costantino & Merchant, 1996, pp. 4-5).
- Conflict is a latent or manifest state where people have opposing interests, values, or needs (Yarn, 1999, p. 115).
- Conflicts are the direct result of some institutions and social norms being incompatible with inherent human needs. [...] aggressions and anti-social behaviors are stimulated by social circumstances. Denial by society of recognition and identity would lead, at all social levels, to alternative behaviors designed to satisfy such needs, be it ethnic wars, street gangs or domestic violence (Burton, 1998).

This list is representative of the field. Notice the operational words in these definitions—perceptions, disagreements, frustration, values, recognition and even needs when accepting that human needs are embedded within culture (Avruch, 1998). These definitions suggest that human beings are in conflict not completely because of any objective condition in the physical world, but rather because human beings' socially constructed interpretations of those objective conditions lead them to behave towards others in certain ways. These key words all point to the conflict dynamics as constructed forms grounded in social, psychological, and historical processes. If conflict is the perception amongst people or groups that their interests are mutually exclusive, then whether people like each other or fear each other can determine how they respond to each other in a situation of objective scarcity. Trust, mistrust, solidarity, animosity, fear, peace of mind, anxiety, confidence, antipathy, and empathy all matter when it comes to

determining how one chooses to act in a conflict, whether a divorce, a work stoppage, or a war. Even when theorists define conflicts as essentially contradictions between the non-negotiable needs of parties, such as Burton and Yarn above, “they tend to point to deep-rooted moral or value differences, high-stakes distributional questions, or conflicts about who dominates whom” which are all factors grounded in “fundamental human psychological needs for identity, security, and recognition” that people will not negotiate over (Spangler & Burgess, 2003).

Yet, by the second half of the 20th century, many social scientists found that the positivist and social constructivist paradigms fostered a professional detachment from the most pressing challenges of modern society. They called for deep engagement in social-political struggles, including examination of contentious relations among population groups. This third research paradigm—critical social science—requires researchers to probe beneath the empirical data about human behaviors to expose the otherwise hidden operations of large-scale institutions, bureaucracies, and governments, and to explain such operations through complex systems of power relations. The impact of this third paradigm of research can be found in a variety of fields, including critical security studies, terrorist studies, resistance studies, race, and racism studies. In addition to offering scathing critiques of modernity, these investigations reveal the social-political dynamics among academics, including social scientists. The works of Michel Foucault, Francois Lyotard, Pierre Bourdieu, and Franz Fanon are instructive on this topic. For example, Foucault sought to break through the epistemic pretensions of positivist-oriented social researchers by characterizing all scientific truth-claims as products of systems of power relations. The exposure of power dynamics constitutes a political act that threatens the scientists’ professional prestige and social power.

Critical social theory represents a third paradigm of social science that impacts PCS. As with the legacy of logical positivism and social constructivism, this third paradigm lends itself to a variety of research methods, assumptions, norms. We offer four defining elements of critical social theory as formulated by Craig Calhoun (2001). First, investigations into society's challenges, struggles, and conflicts require probing their historical, cultural, and political preconditions. Second, such investigations call for continual reflection, re-evaluation, and possible revision of the theoretical framework for explaining how and why such challenges, struggles, and conflicts arise. The impact of power relations represents a primary focus of investigation, including the important theme of the strategic reification of social-political categories by high power groups that appear to be the products of nature rather than effects of systems of power imbalance. Third, the social theorist's research reveals the fundamental inadequacies of other disciplines, such as positivist economics, political science, and behaviorist psychology, regarding the full scope and impact of power imbalance. Fourth, such investigations rest on a unity of theory and practice (praxis) that is inseparable from its emancipatory mission. Towards the goal of the workers' liberation, Karl Marx famously wrote, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1972, p. 109). Such a change requires the social scientific understanding of the inherent contradictions of capitalist society that reveal the preconditions for its demise. Many critical theorists embraced this Marxist theme by advancing a fundamentally transformative ontology, according to which the dialectic of capitalist systems leads to the workers' resistance, rebellion, and liberation.

This fourth element—emancipatory praxis—advanced by many critical social theorists has a presence in PCS. In certain research domains of this field, empirically grounded theories are interlinked inextricably with the conditions for possible liberation of those population groups

vulnerable to violent conditions. More than freeing such groups from the fears of physical violence, such liberation calls for a unity of theory and practice for exposing and undermining the social, historical, and psychological forces that drive conflict groups to engage in large-scale violence. Such forces include the social-psychic contortions of the mind that drive such groups to react violently.

Conflict research has always been closely connected to praxis, as noted by certain conflict theorists.¹ This connection is evident in the origins of the field of conflict studies, depending on how one dates such origins, either in the mid-1950s with the movement around Quincy Wright at the University of Chicago and Kenneth Boulding at the University of Michigan with the founding of *JCR* or to the 1960s and the movements around Johan Galtung and John Burton and the founding of the *JPR*. Johan Galtung's theories of direct, cultural, and structural violence offer the ontological preconditions for liberation in the form of positive and negative peace.

Yet, the emancipatory praxis of PCS is under-examined. In the pages below we argue that such praxis finds its explicit formulation in phronesis research, according to which empirical inquiry is inseparable from the praxis of addressing society's social and political problems towards the goal of liberating society from the preconditions for strife, struggles, and conflicts. The alleged duality between pure and applied research has no place within this paradigm. To date, this research paradigm has failed to garner any explicit attention or critical reflection in our field; the articulation of phronesis research is novel for PCS. We seek to remedy this problem by demonstrating the currency of phronesis research in explaining the praxis for PCS. Our task is to

¹ See also Potomaki, 2001; Reid & Yanarella, 1976; and Jutila et al., 2008

dive into the uncharted waters of such praxis, designed to emancipate conflict-ridden societies from the scourge of protracted violence in its various forms.

Towards a Genealogy of Research Praxis

This perspective of conflict research as praxis is neither new nor limited to PCS. Marxists of various stripes advanced notions of research as praxis in their extensive investigations into the suffocating forms of domination that permeate social and political systems of capitalist societies. Antonio Gramsci's (2000) framing of such societies as systems of hegemony gives centrality to the scale and depth of domination. As if caught in iron cages, workers are trapped in mind, body, and soul. In addition to their material deprivation, they are targeted for insidious manipulation of the mind, creating a self-image of being servants to the capitalist bosses while ingesting the poison that every worker can acquire happiness through their contributions to industry. For Gramsci (2000), the exposure of such lies constitutes a political act that calls for detailed studies of the historical trajectory of past political struggles for freedom by low power groups (p. 195). The praxis researcher operates as an agent for change, educating workers about their plight. Gramsci (2000) writes that praxis is:

the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even unpleasant ones, and in avoiding deception [impossible] by the ruling class and event more by themselves. (p. 197)

Rather than a retreat from the realities of hegemonic systems, such investigations reveal the truths about real-world systems of power that impose totalizing and oppressive controls over workers.

Research as praxis served as a guiding principle of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists. As one of the School's founding members, Max Horkheimer defined true praxis as the unity of thought about mechanisms of oppression and action towards liberation. Only through this unity of thought and action can genuine freedom be achieved. For truth to be advanced, "human beings who possess it stand by it unbendingly, apply it and carry it through, act according to it, and bring it to power against the resistance of reactionary, narrow, one-side points of view" (Horkheimer, 1993, p. 184). Such praxis centers on revealing, understanding, and overcoming the ossification of capitalist modes of thought (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 33). According to Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer's colleague at the Frankfurt School, such modes of thought tend to elevate to positions of power the authoritarian personality who tends to implement fascist-oriented political policies.²

In their 1947 publication *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno developed a bold and comprehensive denunciation of Enlightenment in the context of modern Western societies. Enlightenment sought to liberate societies from mythic thinking, mass obedience, and political tyranny through the power of scientific knowledge and liberal democratic values (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Despite such aspirations, the Enlightenment gave birth to the very forces it sought to eliminate. According to Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and install them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity" (p. 1). The entanglement of myth and science, as well as

² Continuing the tradition of neo-Marxist critiques, Herbert Marcuse integrated his form of Marxist-oriented praxis with a psychoanalytical critique of advanced industrial societies. In such societies, human behaviors are converted into a single, regimentation of uniformity, leading to a stultifying alienation of individuals from others and themselves (Marcuse, 1964, pp. 6-15).

fantasy and so-called rational truths, represents a Hegelian dialectic of contradictions that lead to humanitarian disasters (Rubenstein, 2016). These disasters include the alienation of humans from nature, humans from other humans, and humans from themselves. They write: “Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 21).

Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* retains the familiar Marxist imperative for revealing to the masses the truth about their suffering, the underlying forces of domination and the instruments of delusion, fabrication and fantasy deployed by such forces. For example, the ideology of Aryan supremacy reflects the replacement of genuine truths with fantasy and rational thought with sophistry. Such replacements reflect the psychotic delusions of paranoics, who attribute the enemy with gargantuan powers of destruction. The prevailing social-political world is characterized through imaginaries about the enemy’s lustful obsession for conquest and violence. Such imaginaries result from the paranoics’ naked drive for symbolic power to define, delimit, and dehumanize the dangerous Other. Before the threat can be eradicated physically, it must be controlled symbolically through the imposition of crystalized categories. Reflecting a collective narcissism to redefine the social-political world in their image, the paranoics endow themselves with an omnipotence that only the righteous deserve. As Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) write, “It is as if the serpent which told the first human ‘Ye shall be as gods’ had kept his promises in the paranoic. He creates everything in his own image...His will permeates the whole universe” (p. 157). No social scientist, expert witness, or respected authority will dissuade the paranoics from thinking that Jews are driven by a lust for world domination or that they embody the anti-Christ. The mere existence of the anti-humans offers the compelling need for total power in the service of their eradication (Horkheimer & Adorno,

2002, p. 150). In addition, the mechanisms for such power center on the psycho-politics of mimicry. Hitler comical performances of righteous rage at the perils facing the innocents of Germany provided his supporters with permission to release their otherwise dormant drive for brutality. With such release, Hitler's emotional gyrations are mimicked among his supporters.³ Such expression of collective rage in public spaces constitute political acts that reinforce the infallibility of the paranoics' grandiose ideology.

Praxis-oriented Social Science

Neither Marx nor his followers invented the notion of research praxis. This concept originated more than three thousand years ago in the work of Aristotle. Philosophically, praxis is ethically driven practice that is inseparable from practical knowledge that emerges from what Aristotle called phronesis research. Such research can be found in politics, a field of inquiry that he invented, as a rational enterprise in acquiring practical knowledge for addressing the prevailing social and political challenges of the day. Such knowledge is charged with a normative mission for determining how to live well and in right relations with each other. For Aristotle, any researcher of politics should be guided by such a mission based on the ideals of a polis. Politics offers an understanding of human psychology, cultural variability, and the ethics of a just society. Such value commitments cannot always be discovered by applying universal principles of justice to all societies. On the contrary, the practical knowledge of politics is highly sensitive to local conditions. Political solutions suitable for one society at a given time may be unworkable for another (Aristotle, 1941 *Ethics*, 1104a7-9). The laws that are just in one society

³ Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) write: "The Fuhrer, with his ham-actor's facial expressions and the hysterical charisma turned on with a switch, leads the dance. In his performance he acts out by proxy and in effigy what is denied to everyone else in reality" (p. 151).

may not be suitable for another society, so that the rational inquiry into the just relations among citizens depends upon the social-political conditions in which they live.⁴

Aristotle's notion of praxis is neither antiquated nor irrelevant to contemporary social science. The currency of his ideas has been demonstrated recently in the formulation of a bold perspective on contemporary social science. According to Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), rather than standing in opposition to the social sciences, Aristotle's phronesis research offers insight into the mission, methods, and subject matter of today's social sciences. Flyvbjerg (2001) brought phronesis research up to date as a social scientific enterprise for addressing society's challenges, problems, and aspirations (p. 14). He argues that many social scientists are unwittingly phronesis researchers. Their realization of this perspective begins with their reflection on the following critical questions about their research (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 60):

What are we doing?

Is it desirable?

What should be done?

Who gains and who loses and by which mechanisms of power?

These questions are designed to foster critical reflection on the nature and mission of the social sciences. From such reflection, Flyvbjerg goes on to offer the following three defining requirements of phronesis research: (1) the primacy of power as the subject matter of research; (2) the attention to the micro-physics of power; and (3) the normativity of power.

⁴ Aristotle writes: "In matters concerning praxis and the things that are in our interest, there is nothing fixed, just as in matters of health" (Aristotle, 1941, *Ethics*, Book 1, 1104a3-5).

Subject matter of research. Power dynamics are implicated in all interpersonal and intergroup interactions. The patterns, practices and mechanisms of power go to the core of phronesis research, with special attention given to social and political institutions (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 132). Investigations tend to address the following: Who gains and who loses from the implementation of a particular policy, legislation, institutional practice, or overriding principle? Who controls the channels of power? What are the possibilities of changing power relations? Questions about state power goes to the heart of the existence of the state. The state's power to govern, rule, control, persuade, influence, or dominate is virtually axiomatic to its legitimacy. Of course, such power has lethal implications in cases of state-sponsored human rights violations, mass atrocity, or systemic neglect.

All of this is suited perfectly for investigations of protracted violent conflicts.⁵ In general, power relations between adversaries in protracted conflicts can be hard or soft, exerted by one individual or many, and impact people immediately or in the future. In its hard form, conflict protagonists strive to break the will of their adversaries, forcing compliance to their demands, which in turn often leads to cycles of physical violence and counter-violence. Such protagonists seek to control or destroy the lives, or life conditions, of their adversaries. In its destructive form, power is understood as control and/or coercion. However, the intersection of power and politics in PCS is not always reducible to such processes of coercion. For example,

⁵ There is an element of triviality in the claim above that power is ubiquitous to conflict dynamics. To declare that conflict actors interact with each other through the use of power is almost equivalent to claiming that some force underpins what conflict actors do to each other. Such a claim is almost trivially true. The non-trivial questions regarding the research about power and conflict is not whether their actions have a power source but what exactly is the character and structure of such a source.

grassroots peace movements can intensify their power through the instruments of collaboration, coordination, and social bonding. Such power is rarely a form of external control or domination.

In accordance with positivist social scientists, phronesis researchers accept the reality of power relations while taking seriously the social construction of intergroup dynamics among conflict groups that tends to include exaggerated (or fantastic) projections of the vices, character flaws, and dehumanized status of the enemy Other. While such projections may reflect the unreality of imaginary constructions, the forms of violence that arise from such projections are anything but delusional. In cases of protracted violent conflicts, the suffering of those targeted militants is not imaginary, despite the layers upon layers of meaning-making among conflict actors about suffering. For example, in the lead-up to the 1994 genocidal violence in Rwanda, Hutu extremists orchestrated an intense propaganda campaign seeking to demonize all Tutsis, casting them as the Nazis of Rwanda with designs to exterminate all Hutus (Rothbart & Bartlett, 2008). In this case the politics of managing, controlling, imposing, revising, manipulating, or manufacturing the constructs of identity and difference are centrally located in the notions of the sense of collective sense and collective other. Yet, the reality of genocidal violence is beyond reasonable doubt.

Understanding power. Power relations are understood through the micro-processes of social interactions. Power relations underpin all social interactions. With its many faces, multiple forms, and variety of techniques, power relations are neither exclusively centralized in a single source nor exerted in a top-down fashion. And power is not a commodity. It's not like money which can be acquired, seized, shared, hoarded, accumulated, quantified, or stolen (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). Power is like "manifold relations of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions..." (Foucault

1990, p. 94). The power of the state to control its political subjects is woven into a “network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top” (Foucault, 1995, pp. 176-7). From a power-perspective, every agent is entangled in a back-and-forth interaction with the target as they affirm and/or negate each other. The threat of physical violence looms over those who escape such a reach, at the least, in criminal law.

Given the relationality of power, the exertion of power by one source, such as a state institution, is always subject to possible reciprocity. As the governmental bodies exert their power, they are vulnerable to possible resistance, mass protests, or violent rebellion. Beneath the surface of the state’s authority to control its political subjects are potentially threatening forces. As a network of relations, state power includes a polarity of two counter-veiling forces—first, the state’s capacity to control its political subjects and, second, the potential resistance of these subjects to such control based on accusations of corruption, incompetence, injustice, or brutal treatment by state authorities (Rothbart, 2019). Such resistance can be perceived by state leaders as a threat to their legitimacy. Although the low power group cannot simply will away their vulnerability, they can fight back by resisting, obstructing, protesting against, undermining, or rebelling against political authorities.

Phronesis researchers are expected to immerse themselves in the weeds of social-political interactions, giving epistemic primacy to thick descriptions of “little things” (Flyvbjerg 2001, p. 133). The true measure of state power gives epistemic preference to micro-processes of social interactions. Context dependent knowledge is essential for understanding the nuances of power relations. Case studies constitute a primary form of such knowledge and are integral to such investigations in service of developing theories. Some case studies are elevated to paradigms for subsequent social scientific investigations.

Regarding methodological directives, phronesis research is not defined by a single epistemology. For example, empirical data can be quantitative or qualitative. It can be extracted from laboratory experiments or by oral testimony from those who witness a social encounter. Data can be organized through narrative themes of discourse or regression analysis of large datasets, for example. Yet, one methodological directive is critical for research praxis, that is, self-reflection of the power dynamics between researcher and research participant. In particular, the relative positioning of the researcher is thoroughly invested with (relational) power. The positivist-oriented norm of experimentation that excludes participants from many phases of data analysis must be abandoned. Consider the taken-for-granted norms of psychological experiments of behaviors. In many experiments, the process of data-gathering tends to include a stimulus which certain research participants experience, followed by an observable response. The analysis of such a response, in the form of quantitative data, reflects a system of positioning of stark duality involving the highly skilled researcher and the ignorant participants. With such positioning, the participants are treated as analytical idiots regarding the causes, sources, and explanations of their own responses to experimental stimuli.

For phronesis research, the inclusion of participants within the data analysis process is critical. Participatory action research (PAR) represents a model for such inclusion. A core commitment of PAR is shared power, democratic decision-making, and collaborative positioning (Call-Cummings et. al., 2020). Its researchers position participants as peers in defining some problem facing a community or population group, designing an action plan, and implementing such a plan for addressing this problem (Kendon, 2007).

The normativity of research. Research findings into power relations between individuals and groups are inseparable from the normative evaluation of such relations. For the phronesis

researcher, moral indifference to power relations is not a viable stance. Nor is the positivist-oriented stipulation that the researcher's moral judgments have no place in objective empirical research. For phronesis, genuine knowledge about power relations—its sources, instruments, and effects—is charged with normative evaluation.

Such normativity in investigations into power dynamics represents a primary theme of PCS. Consider for example Johan Galtung's conception of structural violence which is causally linked to systems of inequality that fosters large-scale exploitation, oppression, and life-threatening deprivations (Galtung, 1978, pp. 34-35). Such systems tend to produce extreme poverty, inaccessibility to critical health care, and dangerous living conditions, all of which are preventable forms of suffering that afflict low power groups disproportionately. The implied moral indictment of structural violence is entangled with Galtung's explanatory analysis. For phronesis researchers, the empirical investigations by conflict analysts of such structurally violent systems are determined by the normative responses to such systems, towards the goal of undermining the suffering of low power groups. Such investigations are crucial for undermining fabricated notions that riches enjoyed by high power groups are God-given and the shackles worn by low power groups are harmless ornaments.

If inequality of power relations is central to the dynamics of protracted violent conflict, then the systemic precarity of certain low power groups represents an inevitable consequence. As Judith Butler (2016) writes:

Precarity designates the politically induced conditions in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at a high risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. (p. 25)

Such groups “must attend to [power relations], even abide by it, as [they] think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself” (Butler 2004, p. 29). The vulnerability of such groups to life threatening conditions represents a moral indictment on society. Exposure of such precarity represents a moral act, as the researcher bears witness to the group’s unjust vulnerability to threats from social or political forces that they cannot will away.⁶

Who exactly are the groups that experience systemic precarity? The answer can be controversial. For example, consider genocide studies. Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide identifies categories of vulnerability as “national, ethnical, racial or religious groups.” Yet, such designation deviates from the list developed by Raphael Lemkin, who created the term genocide. Lemkin originally sought to define genocide, in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, as the colonial destruction of the national patterns of the oppressed and the imposition of the national patterns of the oppressors, which could be committed through both direct and structural violence. Lemkin defined nations so broadly that his concept is like what we today would call social groups. Nations were a category that included, in Lemkin’s own words, groups that ranged from the practitioners of entire religions to gamblers or the lovers of particular kinds of poetry. When political realities pushed Lemkin to limit the definition of genocide at the United Nations, he still sought to include economic and political groups as potential targets of genocide. The exclusion of such groups from the Genocide Convention was the result of a compromise during deliberations with the Soviet Union, along with U.K. and U.S. demands to define genocide in a

⁶ Regarding the ethics of vulnerability, Paul Ricoeur (2000) writes that “By becoming the source of morality, other people are promoted to the rank of the object of concern with respect to their fragility and vulnerability” (p. 29).

way so that the law could not be applied to the treatment of minority groups, indigenous peoples, and colonial subjects.

Subsequently, most genocide scholars these days do not use the legal definition of genocide to conduct social scientific research and, scholars who do so often coin new terms to refer to the categories of social groups purposefully left out of the treaty (i.e., gendercide, ecocide, democide, etc.) and define these as crimes of comparable moral weight to genocide. According to Barbara Harff (2003), for example:

Genocides and politicides are *the promotion, execution, and/or implies consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents—or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group.* (p. 58)

The relevant point that we are advancing here, however, is that no matter how one defines genocide (as applying to the attempt to destroy any social group, or the attempt to destroy only particular types of social groups), genocide itself is a concept that calls attention to power imbalances between social groups, and defines the groups who are targeted in genocide as inherently low-power groups who face long-term systematic oppression for any number of reasons (antisemitism, scapegoating, social purity, imagined threats, etc.).

In summary, from a phronesis perspective, the praxis of conflict research is grounded on three requirements presented above. So, as indicated in Table 1, such praxis exhibits striking similarities and differences to logical positivism and social constructivism.

Table 1*Three conflict research traditions*

	Positivist Social Science	Social Constructivist Social Science	Praxis Social Science
What is social scientific knowledge?	Knowledge consists of true descriptions and valid explanations of the social phenomena.	So-called knowledge consists of constructions that comprise the actors' interpretative repertoires for meaning-making.	Knowledge consists of those descriptions and explanations that contribute towards liberating population group living under conditions of systemic precarity in relation to social-political forces that threaten their wellbeing or survival.
Does social scientific knowledge provide access	Yes. Access to the real world of social phenomena can be achieved through the	No. Epistemic access to the real world of human affairs cannot be	Yes. Access to the real world of social phenomena can be achieved with

to an external world of human affairs?	proper deployment of methods defined by rational epistemology.	achieved through social constructivist methods.	respect to the power relations that underpin all social interactions.
Are the social sciences value-free?	Yes. The social sciences are devoid of contaminations from the researchers' value judgments.	No. Analysis of the actors' meaning-making processes is inseparable from valuations of the social scientists.	No. Analysis of the actors' meaning-making processes is inseparable from the emancipatory mission of research.

Again, phronesis research in PCS constitutes a purposive investigation designed to dismantle the forces of power imbalance that fosters systemic precarity of low power groups who are subjected to long-term suffering from violence of various forms.

Genocide Studies as Praxis

Again, the two dominant research traditions of logical positivism and social constructionism fail to capture the emancipatory praxis of certain domains of PCS. Framed within the phronesis paradigm, such praxis gives centrality to the moral-politics of bearing witness to imbalanced power relations and resultant impacts on low power groups. We offer genocide studies as a prototype case of research praxis, although we believe this could be equally said of other fields with close ties to conflict research, such as the fields of human rights or contentious politics.

The first generation of genocide scholars, who established the field, approached the problem of genocide from a liberal internationalist paradigm. Scholars such as Helen Fein (1993), Sam Totten (2015), Israel Charny (2016), Samantha Power (2013), Greg Stanton (2016), R.J. Rummel (1994), Irving Louis Horowitz (1980), Manus Midlarsky (2005), Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr (2004; 2018), Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990), and others (see Straus 2007) were interested in praxis as far as it relates to moving powerful state actors in the international system to be guardians of human life, and to place the power of the state institutions and money behind the system of international criminal law in the international system. Such theorists conceptualized state actors as either bystanders, perpetrators, or rescuers (Fein, 1993), and they wanted their research and scholarship to help move the foreign policy of great powers towards the normative goal of intervening in conflicts around the world on behalf of the victims of state violence (Power, 2013). In so far as they viewed states as inherently violent and prone to killing civilians, they viewed their mission as emancipating human beings from the threat of an arbitrary death at the hands of state actors and state institutions (Horowitz, 1980). In this thread, they saw themselves as core parts of the enlightenment project, to free human beings from the threat of arbitrary murder by government (Rummell, 1994; Power, 2013).

The experience of colonization was never far from their view, and this first generation of genocide scholars linked the Holocaust to European colonialism and drew parallels between 19th century colonial mass murder and 20th century genocides. Fein, for example, who wrote the field defining *Sociology of Genocide*, began her study of mass violence specializing in British mass violence in colonial India, and her 1977 treatise on British colonial mass murder is where she develops her thesis on the “universe of moral obligation,” which became so important to her later work in genocide studies and identity/ethnic conflict studies. Chalk and Kurt Johannson (1990)

included many cases of colonial genocides in their seminal text, such as genocides against indigenous peoples and Native Americans. Still, these scholars placed great faith in the redeeming qualities of a liberal international order, and ultimately saw state power bound by international law as necessary for constraining the violence of individual governments against their populations (Irvin-Erickson, 2017; Moses, 2021).

These scholars' texts reflect the three defining elements of research praxis outlined above. Regarding the nature of social scientific knowledge, their praxis perspective of power dynamics shares with the positivist social sciences a commitment to discovering true descriptions and valid explanations of mass murder. Although Adorno questioned the entire endeavor of trying to know the horrors that we now call the Holocaust, extending his query even to the value of poetry, this first generation of genocide scholars broke from Holocaust scholars who followed Adorno and defended the claim that, yes, genocide can be known and studied empirically (genocide studies and Holocaust studies are two distinct fields, though there is overlap). This project of scientifically and empirically knowing genocide was grounded in what came to be known as comparative genocide studies, which was normatively affixed to a larger project of seeking to know genocide so that genocide could be prevented (see Hinton 2012).

This first generation of genocide scholars, however, largely overlooked Lemkin's writings and constructed a mythic image of Lemkin as the founding figure of their field while ignoring the wider body of Lemkin's writings. As such, this first generation of genocide scholars lacked understandings of his connections to critical theory and the debates over praxis that emerged. In 1942, Lemkin was hired as chief consultant on the U.S. Board of Economic Warfare and Foreign Economic Administration, where he befriended Franz Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer and met Herbert Marcuse. Holocaust scholars know Neumann as the author of

Behemoth, an influential if highly contested study of the economic basis of the Nazi regime, and the Ph.D. advisor of Raul Hilberg who is generally considered one of the founding figures of Holocaust studies. Political theorists know Neumann, Kirschheimer, and Marcuse as social democratic German Jewish social scientists who fled Germany in 1933 and contributed to the growth of critical theory when they linked up with Max Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research in New York City (Stiller, 2019). During the Second World War, Neumann, Kirchheimer, and Marcuse were employed by the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office for Strategic Services, and by 1942 Neumann and Lemkin were working together in the same office of the Board of Economic Warfare (Irvin-Erickson, 2017, pp. 112-137). Lemkin's book, *Axis Rule*, would have been unimaginable if Lemkin had not met this circle of Marxist German Jewish emigres. Lemkin, after all, positioned *Axis Rule* directly in conversation with a constellation of contemporary studies of the Nazi regime written by thinkers often associated with critical theory (Irvin-Erickson 2017, p. 103). Lemkin even went so far as to structure his table of contents in *Axis Rule* in ways that would cleverly signal, to his readers who could spot it, that he was writing *Axis Rule* in the same genre as a half-dozen other legal studies of the German state (Irvin-Erickson, 2017, pp. 112-137). The purpose of this signaling was twofold. First, it was an attempt to give him credibility amongst jurists and political officials who were familiar with this genre of legal writing. Second, it allowed Lemkin to signal that his work on genocide as a continuation of this larger conversation taking place within the framework of critical theory. As Hilberg said at the end of his life, his dissertation advisor Franz Neumann pointed him towards *Axis Rule*, a book comprised of about 100 pages of analysis followed by roughly 500 pages documenting the specific legal decrees and laws issued by Axis Powers pertaining to the treatment of subjected groups, to demonstrate how to rigorously and empirically document the

clear, purposeful decisions by powerful actors across a society to escalate repression; engaging in any number of smaller oppressive acts that add up to a program of group-specific destruction.

Such a commitment among genocide scholars towards objective scientific knowledge is evident in their riveting case studies. Consider the case of Darfur in the early 2000s. An enormous body of empirical research demonstrated that the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and their militant allies the Janjaweed, perpetrated murder, executions, torture, and rape on a massive scale (Totten, 2011, pp. 382-384). Attacks on hundreds of villages and towns often began with aerial assaults of fighter jets and helicopter gunships by the SAF, followed by ground assaults by the Janjaweed. The attackers engaged in a scorched earth strategy of killing livestock, torching fields, poisoning well, destroying far equipment, and leveling buildings including health clinics and school (Human Rights Watch, 2004a; HRW, 2004b.) According to a 2009 mortality study, the total death toll of Darfuri civilians is estimated to be around 300,000 (Degomme & Guha-Sapir, 2010). Following an extensive investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, accused Sudan's president at the time, Omar al-Bashir, of orchestrating genocidal violence against three indigenous ethnic groups known as the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa.

Underpinning such violence are interlocking systems of power inequality controlled by the National Congress Party (NCP), an imbalance orchestrated by the central government in Khartoum. During the genocide, the national government was dominated by the NCP which controlled the assignment of positions of power in business, religion, military, and security sectors (Temin & Murphy, 2010, p. 4). Intersecting with this political inequality is a virulent ideological campaign that defines the pure Sudanese as an Arab who follows Sharia law. The architects of this campaign cast these people as civilized, cultured, and advanced, which was to

imply, European. The so-called Sudanese Africans, who were routinely dehumanized as primitives, uncivilized, and descendants from slaves, were submitted to lethal forms of deprivation.

Genocide studies scholars, thus, were charged with the task of providing a moral education in classrooms to inspire a new, young generation of human rights activists who would pressure policy makers in powerful states to take action to prevent genocide, while simultaneously providing policy makers with the scientific knowledge of how, exactly, genocide could be prevented through the careful application of both unilateral (for conservatives) and multilateral (for liberal internationalists) expressions of state power in the name of human rights and international criminal law (see Kuperman, 2011; Üngör, 2011). Such praxis was launched in response to such oppression, seeking the wellbeing and survival of vulnerable population groups (Feierstein, 2011; Hinton, 2012; Hinton et al., 2013), and shared with logical positivist social science a commitment to discover the real-world properties of the social realm. That it departed strikingly from many of the defining principles of the social constructivist social sciences, and at times seemed wedded to a positivist method of analyzing the social world, even became a point of critique from an emerging field of critical genocide studies (Hinton, 2019).

For those who took seriously their charge of generating knowledge of genocide that might be useful to those who sought to prevent or end genocide (i.e., Waller, 2005; 2016), their research praxis is effused with valuations, based on the normative mission of freeing certain categories of people from forces of systemic destruction. Again, the praxis-oriented methodology is designed to produce emancipatory knowledge. Scott Straus (2016), one of the most distinguished leaders of the field, wrote the flagship handbook for genocide and mass atrocity prevention practitioners published by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Fundamentals of*

Genocide and Atrocity Prevention. The book reflects many of his epistemological conclusions from his famous scholarship on the Rwandan Genocide. To illustrate the conception of genocide prevention practice that emerges from these thinkers' axioms, we have adapted tables that Straus offers in *Fundamentals*, which we slightly amended to be reflective of a larger constellation of thinkers. These tables are presented as 2 and 3 below.

Table 2

Frameworks

Genocide/Atrocity Prevention	Violent Conflict Prevention
Prevent, contain violence against non-combatants	Prevent, contain warfare between armed groups
Protect civilians	Target armed actors, state and non-state
Block perpetrators from harming civilians	Mediate between armed groups and find nonviolent solutions
Adapted from: Strauss, 2016; Evans, 2009; Bellamy & Luck, 2013; Woocher, 2012.	

As is evident from this taxonomy between genocide/mass atrocity prevention on the one hand, and violent conflict prevention on the other, genocide prevention scholars do not conceptualize their praxis as orientated towards preventing violence or violent conflict generally. Rather, praxis in this field is directed towards the normative goal of preventing state violence against civilians, populations, and other non-combatants, especially minority groups and other social categories of

people who lack power and are thus exposed to arbitrary oppressive and violent exercises of state power. Praxis in the field is thus framed in both international and domestic terms.

Table 3

Levels of Atrocity Prevention

International Level	Domestic Levels
Responsibility to Protect Norm International Law Foreign Policy of Powerful States	Violent conflict / violence prevention Increasing legitimacy of state institutions Deepening democracy Deepening equity Promote pluralism and tolerance Enhance human rights frameworks End impunity Security sector reform
Adapted from: Strauss, 2016; Evans, 2009; Bellamy, 2013; Woocher, 2012.	

These taxonomies express an honest, normative commitment to saving human life from state violence. Research praxis is therefore framed as a method, ultimately, for saving lives and defending the entire human rights project.

Conclusion

With this article we formally introduce phronesis research to PCS, to show that it has always had a tacit presence. Such research is not everywhere in this field, but it is certainly not nowhere. Situated within the domain of critical social science, phronesis research deviates fundamentally from logical positivist and social constructivist paradigms. Again, phronesis research is definable by (a) the centrality of power relations in the conflict dynamics; (b) the investigation of such dynamics through the micro-physics of power; and (c) the normativity of such investigations. To be sure, each of these requirements raises questions about the research praxis of PCS. For example, what exactly are the specific conditions in which the power relations among conflict actors are solidified and other conditions in which they are transformed through resistance or rebellion? What are the particular empirical methodologies that should be deployed for understanding such power relations and their possible transformation? What are, and who decides, the normative commitments towards peace and justice that guide such methodologies? While these questions remain unanswered in these pages above, we do offer genocide studies as a prototype of such praxis that is driven by the political imperative to liberate conflict actors from the forces, both externally imposed and internally practiced, that drive them towards perpetuating, promoting, or committing acts of mass violence. Such an imperative is not walled off from the epistemic norms of empirical investigations. The traditional duality between pure and applied research has no place in research praxis. The research praxis of phronesis is saturated with the imprint of the moral judgments about the preconditions, mechanisms, and systems of inequality of power relations in the service of society's emancipation.

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