

Is There a Theory of Radical Disagreement?

Oliver Ramsbotham*

Abstract

This article concerns linguistic intractability, the verbal aspect of those conflicts that so far cannot be settled or transformed. At its heart lies the phenomenon of radical disagreement. This is generally discounted in conflict resolution as positional or adversarial debate. It is seen as a terminus to dialogue that must from the outset be transformed, not learnt from. In this article the refusal to take radical disagreement seriously is traced back to the way radical disagreement is described and explained in the third party theories that frame attempts at settlement and resolution in the first place.

On pp. 58-60 a theory of radical disagreement is contrasted with an example. In the theory radical disagreement is described as a juxtaposition of equivalent subjective narratives that do not 'reflect truth' but merely serve as 'motivational tools' for group survival. In the example, it can be seen that neither speaker is saying that. The Palestinian claim (A) is not about a subjective narrative or motivational tool, but about a lived reality endured for 60 years. And the Israeli claim (B) is not about a juxtaposition of equivalent accounts, but a fierce refutation of faults and misrepresentations in what the other says. This mismatch between third party theory and participant example explains a great deal about why third party interventions based on those theoretical assumptions fail.

The rest of the article looks at a range of putative theories invoked in conflict analysis and conflict resolution. This is a search for third party descriptions and explanations that are adequate to examples of what they purport to describe and explain. Surprisingly the net is hauled in empty. The interim conclusion to this article is that there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement.

In the first issue of the International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution, this article sets the scene for an exploration of the relationship between engagement and resolution that it is hoped will be developed in future issues. It will be argued there that the practical implication of the discovery that there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement is that in intractable conflicts it is a mistake to ignore this phenomenon. Radical disagreement is not all too familiar but perhaps the least familiar feature of intense political conflict. What is required in the face of linguistic intractability, therefore, is not less radical disagreement but more – namely promotion of a 'strategic engagement of discourses'. Only then is it possible to move from engagement to resolution and to create the space for a future revival of attempts at settlement and transformation in the linguistic sphere.

* Emeritus Professor of Conflict Resolution, University of Bradford. Paper first presented at the Conflict Research Society Annual Conference, Coventry, September 2012.

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The question at the head of this article arises from my recent work on *linguistic intractability*. Linguistic intractability is the verbal aspect of those conflicts in which so far conflict resolution fails. At the heart of linguistic intractability lies the phenomenon of *radical disagreement*. As ‘adversarial debate’ or ‘positional debate’ radical disagreement is usually disparaged in conflict resolution as an all too familiar dead end, a terminus to dialogue, that must from the outset be transformed, not learnt from. I have argued elsewhere that this is a mistake (Ramsbotham, 2010). Radical disagreement is not a terminus to dialogue, but a characteristic form of it, namely *agonistic dialogue* or dialogue between enemies.¹ And radical disagreement is not all too familiar, but perhaps the least familiar aspect of intense political conflict.

This article focuses on third party accounts of radical disagreement. Are there adequate descriptions and explanations that can inform efforts to manage linguistic intractability when efforts at settlement or transformation prove premature? In short, is there a theory of radical disagreement?

The article begins with a short section to introduce the challenge of radical disagreement in intractable conflicts. It takes an example from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to illustrate what happens if a theory of radical disagreement on which prescriptions for intervention are based is tested against an example of the radical disagreements that it purports to address. This sets the scene for the examination of some of the main theoretical approaches invoked in conflict resolution that follow.

1. Adequacy Tests for Putative Theories of Radical Disagreement

In general, three adequacy tests can be applied to any would-be theory of radical disagreement.

1. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of radical disagreements in which it is not itself directly involved?
2. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of its own involvement in radical theoretical disagreements?
3. Does the theory offer a satisfactory account of its own involvement in radical political disagreements?

1 My term *agonistic dialogue* relates to, but is not identical with, Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonism. In Mouffe’s conception of *agonistic pluralism*, for example, the raw antagonism and violence characteristic of human society in general (the ‘political’) is domesticated and tamed within the democratic *agon*, so that ‘enemies’ become ‘adversaries’, who thereby gain respect for each other as well as for the democratic ‘rules of the game’ that define the space of democratic ‘politics’ (1999:755). Whereas *agonistic dialogue* is verbal exchange between enemies, the war of words, which therefore still includes the antagonistic. Agonistic dialogue is the dialogue of intense political struggle in general without yet trying to distinguish between domesticated and undomesticated varieties.

Oliver Ramsbotham

These three adequacy tests, singly or in combination, will be used to investigate the third party descriptions and explanations of radical disagreement – and prescriptions based on them – that follow.

2. Comparison between a Third Party Account and an Example of Radical Disagreement

To set the scene, I offer an example. In *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict* (Rotberg, 2006), the editor sums up 'lessons from the book' as follows:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict for primacy, power, and control encompasses two bitterly contested, competing narratives. Both need to be understood, reckoned with, and analysed side by side in order to help abate violence and possibly propel both protagonists toward peace. This is an immensely tall order. But the first step is to know the narratives, the second to reconcile them to the extent that they can be reconciled or bridged, and the third to help each side to accept, and conceivably to respect, the validity of the competing narrative [...]

Juxtaposing the 'two justifying/rationalizing narratives' helps us to 'understand the roots of the conflict and the differentially distorted prisms that fuel it'. At the core of such narratives lie 'symbolic constructions of shared identity' or 'collective memories', which do not usually so much 'reflect truth' as 'portray a truth that is functional for a group's ongoing existence'. Each 'is "true" in terms of the requirements of collective memory'. Narratives are 'motivational tools'.

What is required is a 'greater appreciation of the separate truths that drive Palestinians and Israelis', because this could 'plausibly contribute to conflict reduction'. The aim is to narrow, not eliminate, the chasm that separates one strongly affirmed reality from another. The lessons of this book are that the gulf between the narratives remains vast, that no simplified efforts at softening the edges of each narrative will work, and that the fundamental task of the present is to expose each side to the narratives of the other in order, gradually, to foster an understanding, if not an acceptance, of their deeply felt importance to each side. (Rotberg, 2006: 1-17, rearranged and editorially linked)

In the body of the text, four strategies emerge for doing this.

1. Ilan Pappé advocates 'bridging the narrative concept' along the lines already initiated by the new 'post-Zionist' revisionist Israeli historians, among whom he is a prominent figure, in order to narrow differences and if possible produce shared historiographical reconstructions.
2. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gavriel Salvendy do not think that it is possible to overcome the way rival narratives oppose each other's fundamental truths, and, as psychologists, hope to promote reconciliation by 'building legitimacy through narrative' – fostering mutual acknowledgement of sincerity and

therefore validity by recognizing ‘that there are two (legitimate) narratives of the conflict’.

3. Mordechai Bar-On recommends acceptance of the fact that the Zionist and Palestinian narratives ‘negate the very existence of the foe as a collectivity’ and suggests that the focus should rather be on a critical re-examination of the historical record by each side separately. He sees this as a particular task for the Palestinians.
4. Finally, Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan aim to promote ‘better dialogue between two separate but interdependent narratives’ that ‘are intertwined like a double helix’ through their work on the production of parallel texts on the Balfour Declaration, the 1948 war, and the 1987 Intifada, including the idea of getting Israeli and Palestinian schoolchildren to fill in intermediate commentaries.

It can be seen that these recommendations, as interpreted by the editor, are based on a theory of radical disagreement made up of *description* in terms of co-existing and equivalent ‘competing narratives’ or ‘separate truths’, and *explanation* in terms of the function that these are seen to play as ‘distorting prisms’ or ‘symbolic constructions of shared identity’ that shore up ‘a group’s ongoing existence’. These are not ‘reflections of truth’ but ‘motivational tools’.

But already this account is at odds with examples of radical disagreement from the book itself. Here is a radical disagreement between two of its authors, Nadim Rouhana and Mordecai Bar-On. As an example of radical disagreement both A and B must be read together.

- A. Israel will have to face at least part of the truth that the country that they settled belonged to another people, that their project was the direct cause of the displacement and dismantling of Palestinian society, and that it could not have been achieved without this displacement. Israel will also have to confront the realities of the occupation and the atrocities it is committing, and will have to accept that Palestinian citizens in Israel are indigenous to the land and entitled to seek the democratic transformation of the state so that they have equal access to power, resources and decision making, and are entitled to rectification of past and present injustices. (Rouhana, 2006: 133)
- B. There are many historiographical faults in the way Rouhana tells the story [...] The main problem with Rouhana’s thesis [...] lies in his sweeping conclusion that ‘from the moment Zionism was conceived, force has been a central component of its relationship with the Palestinians’ [...] Is it not possible for a Palestinian such as Rouhana to understand that, in 1948, the Jews of Palestine, to their chagrin, could not but use force to defend themselves and impose a solution that was legitimated by a majority of nations? [...] [T]here is no chance that I shall ever consider that my father and mother, who immigrated to Palestine as Zionists in 1924, were criminals. Nor do I consider my actions illegitimate when I

gave the order 'Fire!' and perhaps killed or wounded assailants in response to an ambush on the troop that I commanded on the way to Tel Aviv in December 1947 [...] There is hardly any question that, in December 1947, the fire that later spread throughout the country was ignited at that time by the Palestinians [...] The joy with which Arab intellectuals embraced the new [Israeli] narratives betrays a misguided assumption that, at long last, Israelis see the 'truth' and are ready to adopt the Arab narratives of the conflict [...] The lesson Palestinians should learn from Israel's revisionist historiography is not how correct they are in their own narratives but rather how self-critical they, too, must become. (Bar-On, 2006: 147-148, 167-168)

Neither Rouhana nor Bar-On are saying that their discourses are coexisting or equivalent 'separate truths', nor that they are merely 'functional for group identity'. There is no room for this. The fact that they are *not* saying this is what makes it a radical disagreement. That is why Rouhana rejects all four of the recommendations for action listed above. Rouhana claims that nearly all Palestinians would agree with what he says. I think that most Jewish Israelis would agree with Bar-On. So the editorial account of radical disagreement does not engage with the linguistic intractability that lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The editor himself realizes something of this when he comments:

A next stage, too late for this book, would be for Jawad, Porat, Bar-On and others [he does not name Rouhana] to spend necessary hours together attempting to reconcile the discordant narratives, or at least delineating the precise contours of disagreement. (Rotberg, 2006: 8)

This would, indeed, be the next logical step. In other words, what is wanted is not a study of narratives *of* conflict but an exploration with the conflict parties of narratives *in* conflict. But what would happen if this were attempted? Are there in fact third party accounts that do succeed in 'delineating the precise contours of disagreement' in this way? The rest of the article summarizes my own attempt to answer this question (Ramsbotham, 2010: 133-164). In view of the surprisingly negative outcome of the enquiry, the paper ends with two further questions. Why is there no theory of radical disagreement? And does this matter?

3. Testing Candidate Theories of Radical Disagreement – A Review

Conflict theory is over-determined. There are too many theories of conflict. Almost all the social, political, psychological, historical, cultural, anthropological and biological sciences are founded on theories of conflict, most of them controversial. What follows is a selective survey.

3.1 *Realist Theory*

In realist theory radical disagreement is disregarded as epiphenomenal on the deeper drivers of conflict – interest and power. So there is no motive to take it seriously. Thucydides' Athenian generals dismissed the 'fine phrases' of the Melians as irrelevant. Two and a half millennia later Hans Morgenthau was equally scornful:

It is a characteristic aspect of all politics, domestic as well as international, that frequently its basic manifestations do not appear as what they actually are – manifestations of a struggle for power. Rather, the element of power as the immediate goal of the policy pursued is explained and justified in ethical, legal or biological terms. That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalizations. (Morgenthau, 1948/1973: 83-84)

Neo-realists are even more forthright in ruling out the relevance of radical disagreement at 'system' level. To take it seriously would be a category-mistake (Waltz, 1979: 112). That politicians nevertheless indulge in 'a moral language of rights and duties in their relations with each other' (Brown, 2007; Risse, 2004) is seen as 'self-deception' (Morgenthau, 1948/1973: 83) or 'hypocrisy' (Walzer, 1977: 20).

I do not think that this is an adequate theory of radical disagreement. Invoking the third adequacy test, the Melian dialogue can itself be read as a radical disagreement where, given the discrepancy in power, it was in the *interest* of the Athenian generals to argue (and no doubt believe) the realist case. Here they use it as a stick with which to beat their main enemies, the Spartans:

Of all the people we know the Spartans are most conspicuous for believing that what they like doing is honourable and what suits their interests is just. (Thucydides, 1954: 363)

Conversely, in his own impassioned republican political polemics, Machiavelli famously parted company from the advice meted out in *The Prince*.

In summary, realism does not pretend to offer a theory of radical disagreement.

3.2 *Marxist Theory*

In Marxist theory, radical disagreement is a reflex of class struggle. Underlying changes in the means of production generate both conflict parties (classes) and the struggles between them. So to take radical disagreement seriously as an independent phenomenon is a conceptual error. 'Philosophies of contradiction' like Marxism make no claim to impartiality or to 'ultimate truth' in the way that hegemonial liberal epistemologies do, because they have never claimed to be impartial in the first place. That is why they are revolutionary. In Marxist theory it is a mistake to suppose that anything can be learnt from a study of radical disagreement without first determining the "material, social, political, ideological

Oliver Ramsbotham

and philosophical conditions [that produce] already existing knowledge in the first place” (Althusser, 1970/1971: 141):

No other order, no order which took discourses themselves as a starting-point, could ever begin to indicate how discourses exist materially. (Macdonell, 1986: 95)

I do not think that this is an adequate theory of radical disagreement, among other reasons because – this time invoking the second adequacy test – it does not encompass the radical disagreement between, say, Marxism and Thatcherism. Marxism identifies Thatcherism as mere ideology by exposing its populist appeal to national solidarity as a “veil of equality beneath which the real inequalities of capitalism can carry on” (Fairclough, 1989: 194-195). Marxist theory is not mere ideology in the same sense because it points to material reality – the actual relationship between Thatcherite texts and the “institutional and societal level class struggle that produces them” (Fairclough, 1989: 101). But in the radical disagreement Marxist theory is disparaged as “ideologically, politically and morally bankrupt” (Thatcher, Conservative party conference, 1980), whereas there is stout denial that there is such a thing as populist ‘Thatcherite ideology’ – according to Margaret Thatcher she just called a spade a spade, which is why the ‘ordinary British people’ rallied to her so enthusiastically:

I wouldn’t call this populist. I would say that many of the things which I’ve said strike a chord in the hearts of ordinary people. Why? Because they’re British, because their character IS independent, because they DON’T like to be shoved around, because they ARE prepared to take responsibility, because they DO expect to be loyal to their friends and loyal allies – that’s why you call it populist. I say it strikes a chord in the hearts of people I know, because it struck a chord in my heart many, many years ago. (Thatcher interview BBC Radio 3, 13 December 1985; capitals in the original transcription)

Marxist theory would, of course, repudiate this.

But Marxism does not itself offer a theory of radical disagreement, and does not claim to do so.

3.3 *Conflict Resolution Theory*

Moving away from high theory, how is radical disagreement treated in the cluster of theories that make up classical conflict resolution? Here, as noted at the beginning of this article, it has been usual to disparage radical disagreement as ‘competitive debate’ with the aim, not of theorizing it, but of eliminating it. When confronted with radical disagreement the advice is to:

place the disagreements in perspective by identifying common ground and common interests. When there is disagreement, address the issues and refrain from making personal attacks. When there is disagreement, seek to understand the other’s views from his or her perspective; try to feel what it

would be like if you were on the other side [...] Reasonable people understand that their own judgment as well as the judgment of others may be fallible. (Deutsch, 2000: 32, 35)

There is no incentive to enquire what happens when 'reasonable people' do not do this but instead persist in their quarrel, as is characteristic of linguistic intractability.

In negotiation theory radical disagreement is called 'positional debate' and the advice is to move away from it at the earliest opportunity in order to concentrate on the 'interests' that underlie and explain the positions and are more amenable to conflict resolution (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Floyer Acland, 1995).

In controlled communication and problem solving theory, radical disagreement is similarly disparaged as 'adversarial debate':

In brief, the theory equates a constructive process of conflict resolution with an effective cooperative problem-solving process in which the conflict is the mutual problem to be resolved cooperatively. It also equates a destructive process of conflict resolution with a competitive process in which the conflict parties are involved in a competition or struggle to determine who wins and who loses; often the outcome of a struggle is a loss for both parties [...] At the heart of this process is reframing the conflict as a mutual problem to be resolved (or solved) through joint cooperative efforts. (Deutsch, 2000: 31)

Some in the field do advocate taking note of radical disagreement and letting it run its course, as in Jay Rothman's ARIA (Antagonism, Resonance, Invent, Action) methodology, but the aim in doing so is to demonstrate its bankruptcy and then move on:

You have now experienced a very familiar, and I am sure you will all agree, a rather unconstructive approach to dialogue. Each of you stated your position, each of you suggested why the other side is wrong or to blame for the conflict. Few of you listened to anyone else, and, frankly, very little, if anything, new was learned. This is the normal approach that all of you have experienced perhaps every time you have discussed the situation with someone who holds a very different perspective than your own. I invite you now to experiment with a new way. (Rothman, 1997: 170)

In constructive dialogue theory, following David Bohm (1994), a similar pattern is discernible:

A debate is a fight with verbal, not physical weapons (in French *battre* = beat). The victory usually goes to he who can catch the other in more contradictions [...] A dialogue, *dia logos*, through the word, by using words, is something quite different. There is no competition to win a battle of words. The parties are working together to find a solution to a problem. (Galtung, 2004: 38)

If radical disagreements do occur, the recommendation is to:

start touching them, tinkering with them, shaking them, inserting the word 'not', negating them so that everything becomes more flexible. (Galtung, 2004: 80)

It can be seen that in none of these cases does the communicative theory in question have an interest in theorizing radical disagreement.²

3.4 *Habermasian Critical Theory*

One of the main criticisms of classical conflict resolution has been that it does not work in asymmetric conflicts, because it assumes a symmetry between the conflict parties that is not there. Habermasian critical theory is sometimes invoked to remedy this (Jabri, 1996: 161-163; Jones, 1999; Rothman, 1992: 72).

In Habermas's theory of communicative action, competing validity claims are to be overcome by appeal to the formal-pragmatic stipulations of argumentation itself. The rules to be applied are those implicit in such claims. An ideal speech situation is thus invoked by the participants that by its nature rules out *force majeure* as a way of formulating communicative action.

But does this amount to an adequate theory of radical disagreement? This is a difficult question to answer because it means following through in detail the complex role that saying 'no' to speech-act offers plays in Habermas's overall scheme. Radical disagreement is in principle central to the enterprise because it generates the need for Habermas's approach in the first place. It is also essential to the key concept of *criticizability* – saying 'no' is inseparable from the possibility of saying 'yes' (or abstaining). But when it comes to *criticism* (actually saying 'no') the symmetry breaks down. Agreement is structurally privileged over disagreement in Habermasian theory. For example Habermas assumes that disagreement maps exactly onto agreement in relation to the 'world relations' around which his theory is constructed (the one objective world, the shared social world, and the separate subjective worlds of the communicative actors) (Habermas, 1984: Vol. I, 99-100). But it does not. In radical disagreement the world relations themselves are also involved. This involvement of the world relations is what *constitutes* the radical disagreement. It is what characterizes linguistic intractability (Ramsbotham, 2010: 125-127, 149-156).

The result of this can be seen in Vivienne Jabri's application of Habermasian theory to conflict resolution in the form of discursive ethics (1996). For example, she appears to acknowledge the role of radical disagreement in cases where the Habermasian search for consensus fails:

2 In addition to Jay Rothman's ARIA methodology, other conflict resolution programmes that do address the issue of radical disagreement include Guy and Heidi Burgess's 'Constructive Confrontation' (1996), Johnson et al.'s 'Constructive Controversy' (2000), Barbara Bradford's 'Managing Disagreement Constructively' (2004), Bernard Mayer's *Staying with Conflict* (2009) and Myrna Lewis's 'Deep Democracy'.

Individuals and groups involved in social relations do not always reach rational consensus. Where disagreement occurs, a variety of options are available. Groups and individuals may adopt strategic behaviour where actors may seek to influence communicative interaction through, for example, the direct manipulation of information on their intentions or the shared external world. Groups may also break off communication and resort to violence [...] A process situated in discursive ethics, however, rejects these options and enters a dialogic relationship of free objection and justification. (Jabri, 1996: 165)

But now it can be seen that the radical disagreement that caused the disruption is once again written out of the script. None of the three options envisaged here relates to it. The first two are merely strategic or forcible options, and the third is a restatement of the Habermasian programme whose failure to find consensus triggered the options in the first place. The option Jabri does not contemplate is the option of taking radical disagreement itself seriously when other alternatives fail. There is no adequate Habermasian theory of radical disagreement.

3.5 Foucauldian Theory

Others appeal to Foucault. For example, in her outstanding study of the way in which ‘myths and truths started a war’ in Kosovo, Julie Mertus gathers a remarkable collection of antagonistic Serb and Albanian testimonies. These are juxtaposed and explained in equivalent terms. For Mertus the leaders on both sides knew that much of this was politically motivated propaganda. At the level of the ‘general population’, in contrast, confined as they were within their own communities, it was a case of ‘hidden transcripts of anger, aggression and disguised discourses of dignity’, where neither would ‘understand each other’s transcripts’ even if they could gain access (Mertus, 1999: 10). So Mertus does not follow this up. She has no interest in exploring the radical disagreement itself.

Once again I think that this is mainly a result of her prior theoretical understanding of linguistic intractability:

for those who are interested in understanding and predicting behaviour, what matters is not what is *factually true* but what people believe to be ‘Truth’.

Here she invokes Foucault. Each society has its own ‘regime of truth’ and the “opposite of a Truth is not necessarily a lie, rather it is a competing Truth linked to an alternative self-image” (1999: 9-10).

This theory of verbal disputes as competing Truths that are private to communities and are to be understood as contingent productions of power is another version of the ‘common description’. It renders pointless any idea of taking the radical disagreement itself seriously as a contest over factual truth.

It is worth noting that Mertus does not apply this to her own verbal battle with Serb officials. When she set out on her research her original aim was not to study competing Kosovo Albanian and Serb ‘Truths’, but the factual truth about

Oliver Ramsbotham

alleged Serb atrocities. She was then side-tracked into the former when the wide disparity between those accounts became apparent to her. But she did not forget her first intention. On Serb atrocities, she is clear that there had indeed been 'years of gross human rights abuses against Albanians by Serbian officials'. This was not just a 'Truth' for Mertus but a factual truth: 'I was right about the abuse'. (Mertus, 1999: 9)

In her radical disagreement with the Serbs Mertus no longer talks about 'Truths' but about truth.

Foucault did the same when he was involved in intense political argument, for example, in relation to Soviet actions in Poland in 1982:

For ethical reasons, we have to raise the problem of Poland in the form of a non-acceptance of what is happening there, and a non-acceptance of the passivity of our own governments. (Foucault, 1989: 377)

This is not a criticism of Foucault because he never claimed to offer a theory of radical disagreement in the first place, whether in his early 'archaeological' research, or in his 'genealogical' homage to Nietzsche, or in his later re-interpretation of his work in terms of 'problematization' (Ramsbotham, 2010: 146-147). His aim was to trace the subtle ways in which intricate eddies of power/knowledge precipitate forms of reification, subjection and exclusion. Things that appear ineluctable happen to have evolved like that, and can therefore evolve differently in future. His concern was to subvert rigid categories – including the crude dialectic of disagreement that reproduces what it opposes in over-simplification and violence – in the interest of emancipation. The solvent for the normalizing deceptions of domination is micro-analysis and hyper-dispersal, not confrontation. Nothing could be further from the mutual refutation and brutal either-or of radical disagreement. For Foucault radical disagreement is at most a superficial moment in the historical evolution of regimes of truth

Returning to Mertus, consequent upon her descriptions and explanations are her prescriptions for preventative action in the communicative sphere. Given the similarity of her analysis to that in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict*, it is not surprising that her recommendations are also similar – although she is one of the few who recognize the limits to dialogue for mutual understanding in times of maximum intractability:

Allowing competing Truths to float through the air in the same space, unjudged and unquestioned, can be a revolutionary act. The Truths may always exist. But the very telling can provoke self-reflection and dismantle the link between Truths and the degrading of an oppositional "other". The telling may narrow the gap between Truths, creating a common bridge toward something else. Yet sometimes the divisions between people are too great, the fear too intense, the desire of some to maintain or gain power too overwhelming. The mere telling is not enough to stem conflict. Thus we cannot stop after the story-telling. We must have the will to think of bold, even

drastic interventions to change the status quo into a more peaceful something else. (Mertus, 1999: 4)

But, because Mertus interprets what is said in terms of subjective Truths, she leaves her examples ‘floating’ separately, and ‘unjudged’, and sees no point in promoting their dynamic engagement or exploring the resulting radical disagreement that lies at the heart of the linguistic intractability. She does not recognize radical disagreement as distinct from what she has already – brilliantly – exposed. So there is no further linguistic recourse after the limits of ‘story-telling’ are reached. The rest is non-verbal intervention or linguistic therapy – or just ‘something else’.

3.6 *Gadamerian Hermeneutic Theory*

Gadamerian hermeneutics has been influential among those who want to overcome the damaging effects of cultural difference in violent conflicts. In *Truth and Method* (1960/1975) Gadamer suggested that the interpretation of texts could be seen as analogous to a ‘conversation’. In conflict resolution it works the other way. Dialogue is seen as a mutual interpretation of texts. Gadamer’s idea of understanding as a process of recognizing the prejudices that constitute our ‘horizon’ when they are challenged, and thus ‘attaining a higher universality’ through a never-ending ‘fusion of horizons’ (1960/1975: 272) has inspired many:

[Gadamer’s] single most important insight may turn out to be a conceptual scheme that allows us to overcome cultural conflicts as well as clashes of different forms of life. (Arnsward, 2002: 35)

But how does this relate to linguistic intractability? I have argued elsewhere that Gadamer does not offer a theory of radical disagreement (Ramsbotham, 2010: 156-160). On the contrary, he severely criticises the very idea of the ‘statement’, which he rejects as entirely inimical to the nature of hermeneutics, and instead spends his best energies conceptualizing the idea of the ‘question’ which *prima facie* dissolves radical disagreement from the outset:

[The] concept of the statement, the dialectical accentuation of it to the point of contradiction, is [...] in extreme contrast to the nature of the hermeneutical experience and the linguistic nature of human experience of the world. (Gadamer, 1960/1975: 425)

Here, Charles Taylor applies Gadamer to the challenge of accommodating radically different ‘ways of holding things true’:

For instance, we become aware that there are different ways of believing things, one of which is holding them as a ‘personal opinion’. This was all that we allowed for before, but now we have space for other ways and can therefore accommodate the beliefs of a quite different culture. Our horizon is extended to take in this possibility, which was beyond its limit before.

Oliver Ramsbotham

But this is better seen as a fusion rather than just an extension of horizons, because at the same time we are introducing a language to talk about their beliefs that represents an extension in relation to their language. Presumably, they had no idea of what we speak of a[s]'personal opinions', at least in such areas as religion, for instance. They would have had to see these as rejection, rebellion, and heresy. So the new language used here, which places 'opinions' alongside other modes of believing as possible alternative ways of holding things true, opens a broader horizon, extending beyond both the original ones and in a sense combining them. (Taylor, 2002: 287)

Applying this to radical disagreement between, say, those who want to establish western-style democracy in Afghanistan or Iraq, and those who want to reject it, what does it mean to say, as in the first paragraph, that we Western democrats are expanding our horizon to take in what was before outside it? If we are the only ones making the adjustment, what difference will this make to our actions? Do we now accept that 'believing things' also means obeying what God has revealed whatever our opinion may be? So will we submit to what the other wants and acquiesce in the establishment of Sharia? If not, is the other not likely to reject our self-proclaimed expanded understanding as yet another hypocritical ruse for getting our way? Is this, in fact, not what Islamists do say?

And what of the reciprocal move outlined by Taylor in the second paragraph? For there to be a fusion of horizons must those wanting to impose sharia learn to speak a 'new language' that 'places "opinions" alongside other modes of believing as possible alternative ways of holding things true'? Does this include non-Muslim opinions? What does 'alongside' mean in the context of the struggle between western democracy and sharia? Is there room for this?

Can we Muslims put an issue that has already been decided for us by Allah up for a vote and accept the will of the majority if they vote against the will of Allah? Of course we cannot, so therefore we can never accept democracy as defined, practised and promoted by America. (Abu Musab, 2003)

In ongoing intractable conflict, would not those who want to impose sharia reject the whole idea that this 'opens a broader horizon, extending beyond both the original ones and in a sense combining them'? Would they not see this, too, as yet another way of insidiously indoctrinating Muslims and of undermining Islam from within? Is this not what many Muslims (and not only Muslims) do say about ecumenicism and the interfaith movement, for example? The radical disagreement does not appear in Taylor's version of Gadamer at all.

3.7 *Informal Reasoning Theory*

'Informal reasoning' or 'practical reasoning' studies inference and the construction and testing of arguments. The aim is to analyze what reasons are being proposed for believing or acting in certain ways and to assess whether or not these reasons should be accepted. This looks promising, because in the process it might

be supposed that radical disagreement would come up as a particular area of study (Ramsbotham, 2010: 22-25).

But a distinction is usually drawn between factual assessment of the truth of propositions (premises or conclusions) and logical assessment of the validity or force of inductive inference. Factual assessment and logical assessment both contribute to the evaluation of the soundness of an argument – the assessment of whether there are good reasons for accepting the truth of its conclusion(s). But in informal reasoning analysis it is nearly always the latter – logical assessment – that is the main concern. In the factual assessment of the truth of a proposition a hearer may adopt four stances:

- acceptance (believing it)
- rejection (not believing it)
- abstention
- indifference

But the second of these is not usually seen to introduce special complications. Relatively little effort is usually expended on the substance of a dispute – in other words, on whether particular premises are true. The main focus of attention is on the logical assessment of the validity or force of the inference. This is seen to be less contaminated by empirical and speaker-related factors, and therefore to be more amenable to clarity of analysis. For example, in *The Logic of Real Arguments* (1988) Alec Fisher (48-69) puts himself into the shoes of the arguer by asking: “what arguments or evidence would justify me in asserting the conclusion?” He then insists that this does not refer to ‘truth conditionality’ (‘what would have to be true or false for the conclusion to be true or false?’), but only to justified assertion (‘what arguments or evidence would justify me in asserting the conclusion?’). He then identifies justified assertion with subject-dependent belief (‘what would I have to know or believe in to be justified in accepting it?’).

But this is exactly the point where the exploration of agonistic dialogue parts company with informal reasoning analysis. In agonistic dialogue conflict parties do talk about truth conditions and do not translate everything that is said into the language of subject-dependent belief. That is what makes these exchanges radical disagreements. So for a third party analyst to dismiss truth conditionality at the outset in the testing of sound arguing is to beg what is in question in radical disagreement. Watertight distinctions such as that between truth and validity break down in agonistic dialogue and are found to be part of what is disputed (Ramsbotham, 2010: 96-99, 127-130).

3.8 *Psycho-Social Constructionist Theory*

In psycho-social constructionist theory, radical disagreement is disparaged as psychological projection or social construction (Ramsbotham, 2010: 26-29):

The idea that there is one version of events that is true (making all others false) is [...] in direct opposition to the central idea of social constructionism, *i.e.* that there exists no ‘truth’ but only numerous constructions of the world,

Oliver Ramsbotham

and which ones receive the stamp of ‘truth’ depends upon culturally and historically specific factors. (Burr, 1995: 81)

Yet it is precisely characteristic of radical disagreement that conflict parties do appeal to truth, reality and justice, and not just to their own ‘constructions’. So for analysts to begin with a third party presumption that there is no ‘truth’ but only contingent constructions is to beg the main question, and to preclude serious enquiry into the phenomenon being investigated.

Similarly, in terms of methodology the idea that linguistic practices are ‘externalizing’ is seen to apply to all social activities – that is to say to ‘all occasions in which people employ the sense-making interpretative procedures which are embodied in the use of natural language’. From this premise a sweeping conclusion can be reached about social science research in general, and especially about social science research that ‘employs people’s accounts as investigative resources’ – as does the phenomenology of radical disagreement:

when people are asked to provide reports of their social lives in ethnographic research projects, or when people are required to furnish more formal answers to interview questions about attitudes or opinions, they are not merely using language to reflect some overarching social or psychological reality which is independent of their language. Rather, in the very act of reporting or describing, they are actively building the character of the states of affairs in the world to which they are referring. This raises serious questions about the status of findings from social science research projects which trade on the assumption that language merely reflects the properties of an independent social world. (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998: 228)

The exploration of radical disagreement trades on no such assumption. But nor does it trade on the opposite assumption that when people use language to describe, justify, recommend or refer to how things are or should be in the world, they merely construct the states of affairs that they refer to. To make assumptions of either of these kinds is to prejudge what is being investigated, whereas it often turns out that it is these very distinctions that are integral to what is at issue in the disagreement – and that this is the key to linguistic intractability.

3.9 *Anthropological Theory*

Comparative anthropological studies provide a rich source of material for conflict analysis (Fry & Bjorkqvist, 1997). To give one example, Marc Ross’s *The Culture of Conflict* compares ethnographic data with ninety pre-industrial societies in an attempt to answer the question: “Why are some societies more conflictual than others?” (1993). Drawing on what are in some cases by now venerable studies, he asks why among the Yanomamo of southern Venezuela a “militant ideology and the warfare associated with it are the central reality of daily existence” (Chagnon, 1983), whereas the Mbuti pygmies of the Zaire rain forest are “at peace with themselves and with their environment” (Turnbull, 1978). His general answer is that:

the psychocultural dispositions rooted in a society's early socialization experiences [e.g., childrearing] shape the overall level of conflict, while its specific pattern of social organization [e.g., kinship] determines whether the targets of conflict and aggression are located within a society, outside it, or both. (Ross, 1993: 9)

It can be seen why comparative anthropological conflict theory of this kind discounts radical disagreement as, at most, merely functional for the internal drivers of conflict in different societies.

Similar results are obtained if attention shifts from the comparative analysis of different societies to studies of human nature itself, including the roots of human aggression (Rapoport, 1989; Staub, 1989). Bitter controversy has divided the field, for example between those who see violence as a learnt behaviour rather than an evolutionary predisposition (Groebel *et al.*, 1989; Mead, 1940), and 'evolutionary psychology' (EP), which attacks this as the politically correct "central dogma of a secular faith" (Pinker, 2002: chap. 3). This is in turn furiously denounced by those who see EP as itself politically motivated:

the claims of EP in the fields of biology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and philosophy are for the most part not merely mistaken, but culturally pernicious [...] Like the religious fundamentalists, the fundamentalist Darwinians who wish to colonise the social sciences have political as well as cultural objectives [...] The political agenda of EP is transparently part of a right-wing libertarian attack on collectivity, above all the welfare state. (Rose & Rose, 2001: 3, 8, 125)

Here is an example of radical disagreement from within the heartland of anthropological theory. I do not think that it is adequately dealt with.

Something similar applies to Nietzsche's theoretical dismissal of verbal disagreement as a herd phenomenon located at the most attenuated end of language, itself an attenuation of consciousness, which is in turn "the last and latest development of the organic and hence what is most unfinished and unstrong" (1974: 84-85). For Nietzsche, animal and human action is impelled by unconscious physiological drives: "Every drive is a type of thirst for power; every one has its perspective, which it wants to force on the other drives as a norm." For these perspectives to masquerade as independent deliverances of reason or power-free knowledge is therefore a lie. So to approach them in terms of their own self-articulations would be absurd:

whatever becomes conscious becomes by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, sign, herd signal; all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization [...] Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to consciousness is only the smallest part of this – the most superficial and worst part – for only this conscious thinking takes the form of words. (Nietzsche, 1974: 298-300)

Oliver Ramsbotham

Yet nothing was more characteristic of Zarathustra's hammer-blows than the contempt with which he dismissed his opponents in the radical disagreements that marked his tempestuous passage through the world. And it was Nietzsche's own extraordinary polemical power and skill that subsequently made him famous.

3.10 *Radical Feminist Theory*

'Difference feminism' mounts a direct challenge to gender-blind universalistic claims that fail to understand their own historical contingency. This includes the whole setting within which radical disagreement is defined (Ramsbotham, 2010: 4-5, 237).

Best known, perhaps, through Carol Gilligan's critique of Laurence Kohlberg's rationalist-universalist assumptions in developmental ethics and her subsequent advocacy of the idea of ethics as inclusive conversation (1982, 2002), the discursive assault extends to the idea of language as a symbolic (thetic) system that is already gendered through its exclusion of the pre-symbolic (semiotic) other. Oppositional thought itself, therefore, (including the construction of sexual identities as opposites) is subverted by the 'semiotic transgression of the thetic' when the gender critique exposes this violence in its very heartland (Kristeva, 1986). In Freudian terms this is the pre-oedipal challenge to the whole of phallogocentric western philosophy (Irigaray, 1977/1985). It is an attempt to liberate repressed voices from outside the symbolic order itself.

Radical disagreements, with their superficial juxtaposition of incompatible truth claims, epitomize male-gendered linguistification, dichotomous simplification, adversarial rationalization, competitiveness, separation from the relational, and the ready physiological antagonism characteristic of those who have a low arousal threshold. In short, radical disagreements, and the conflicts interpreted through them, are seen to be contingent phenomena. And, as such, they can only be dispersed by subversion. To take them seriously on their own terms would be to buy into their delusory universality and to perpetuate the intrinsic violence that they represent.

Can this wholesale dismissal count as an adequate theory of radical disagreement? Not if the term has any traction at all in its own terms – for example, in the radical disagreement between difference feminism and those patriarchal traditions that reject it. Here there is a tension between the 'gender' and 'culture' critiques of positivism inasmuch as the culture-sensitivity of the latter includes acknowledgement of the (contingent) validity of cultures in which feminism is anathematized as western imperialism – the opposite of its own self-understanding. In this radical disagreement – if it is taken seriously at all – the entire conceptual basis of difference feminism can be seen to be already involved. This 'prior involvement of distinctions invoked' is characteristic of radical disagreement in general (Ramsbotham, 2010: chap. 5). And this does not emerge if linguistic intractability is left unexplored. Here is a portentous radical disagreement of global significance that has hardly begun to be developed and is therefore so far ill-understood. A major reason for this is the inadequacy of theoretical accounts of the phenomenon of radical disagreement in the first place.

3.11 *Post-structural Theory*

Post-structural theory does not even allow radical disagreement to get going in the first place, because the brutal oppositions and crude binaries that constitute the struggle are already pre-deconstructed (Ramsbotham, 2010: 237-239; Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2011: 406-408). One way to show this is to look at the way in which a field of study that has adopted post-structural theory into its own self-understanding as a discipline describes itself. Here, for example, is a collection of passages from Chris Barker's *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* that outline the theoretical assumptions on which the field of cultural studies is itself based. Passages are quoted verbatim but breaks between passages are not marked:

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of enquiry that explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning. Representationalist epistemology has largely been displaced within cultural studies by the influence of poststructuralism, postmodernism and other anti-representationalist paradigms. Common sense, and realist epistemology, understands truth to be that which corresponds to or pictures the real in an objective way. Constructionism, of which cultural studies is a manifestation, argues that truth is a social creation. Cultural studies has argued that language is not a neutral medium for the formation of meanings and knowledge about an independent object world 'existing' outside of language. Rather, it is constitutive of those very meanings and knowledge. Thus, we make the switch from a question about truth and representation to one concerning language use. Cultural studies seeks to play a de-mystifying role, that is, to point to the constructed character of cultural texts and to the myths and ideologies which are embedded in them. It has done this in the hope of producing subject positions, and real subjects, who are enabled to oppose subordination. These concepts all stress the instability of meaning, its deferral through the interplay of texts, writing and traces. Consequently, categories do not have essential universal meanings but are social constructions of language. This is the core of the anti-essentialism prevalent in cultural studies. That is, words have no universal meanings and do not refer to objects that possess essential qualities. One way we can understand this approach is by practising the art of deconstructing key binaries of western thinking. Thus, throughout the book, I put forward a particular binary [such as true/false] for students to deconstruct. Either/or binaries are dissolved by denying that the problem is best described in dualistic terms at all. (Barker, 2003: 7, 31, 33, 34, 54, 85)

It is no surprise that the phenomenon of intractable cross-cultural conflicts and the radical disagreements associated with them does not feature in this book. The theoretical space that would allow it has been preemptorily shut down. The prior exclusion of 'representationalist', 'common sense', 'realist' and 'essentialist' epistemologies, and the substitution of 'post-structural', 'postmodern', 'constructionist' and 'deconstructionist' epistemologies, sweeps away the possibility of radical disagreement from the beginning. What is eliminated includes features that are characteristic of radical disagreement – including reference to binaries such as

truth, falsehood, justice, injustice, and to claims about how things are and should be in the external world.

So, for example, the radical disagreement at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict noted above vanishes in Barker's account of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies already knows better than Israelis or Palestinians how words can and cannot be used and how they are to be understood. It translates questions of truth, representation (reality) and justice into locutions about language use. It deconstructs 'either/or binaries' and denies that problems can be 'described in dualistic terms at all'. It does not need to listen to what the spokespersons of the cultures in question are actually saying.

But in this self-definition, I suggest, Cultural Studies as a whole finds itself in conflict with most of the world's cultures, for whom uncompromising and didactic secular post-structuralism of this kind is rejected out of hand. But because of its prior theoretical assumptions, it does not recognize this radical disagreement in which it is itself caught up.

3.12 *Complex Systems Theory*

David Stroh has described systemic thinking as 'mental models made visible', and Norbert Ropers sees one of the defining characteristics of complex systems thinking as "thinking in mental models yet acknowledging perspective dependency" (2008: 13):

Accepting that all analytical models are a reduction of the complex reality (and are necessarily perspective-dependent) and are therefore only ever a tool and not "the reality" as such.

Mental models are the conceptual frames or cognitive structures, largely unconscious, that shape our tacit knowledge and beliefs and adapt us to conform to prevailing social norms – what Lakoff and Johnson have called 'the metaphors we live by' (1980).

Within these terms, therefore, how are radical disagreements described and analyzed? For example, how do they appear in complex systems perspective maps? It is difficult to demonstrate this in the space available, but I have argued elsewhere that they do not appear at all (Ramsbotham, 2010: 45-51). Radical disagreements are treated as coexisting and distinct 'beliefs, feelings and behaviours' in the dynamical-systems approach (Coleman, 2003), and as 'widely-held beliefs and norms' in systemic conflict analysis maps within the 'attitude' dimension of the SAT model of peacebuilding (Ricigliano, 2001: 2). Individual 'belief clouds' feature in some systems perspective maps, but not the radical disagreement itself. The rest of the map is treated as independent of conflict parties' truth claims or recommendations and justifications for action, even when this clearly begs key issues in the verbal battle. Neither the dynamics of radical disagreement, nor the fusion of fact and emotion so characteristic of it, are shown. Nor is the way linguistic intractability often involves third party analysis itself (the conceptual assumptions on which the mapping is based are themselves contradicted by some – or even all – the conflict parties).

Norbert Ropers describes and explains mental models like this:

all parties have developed their own narratives or 'mental models' of the conflict, as well as options and possibilities of conflict resolution. These narratives and models have had tremendous impact on the way parties communicate and interact with each other. They often develop a life of their own and are deeply ingrained in the attitudes and behaviour of the respective collectives. (Ropers, 2008: 17)

In order to overcome this reductive antagonism, Ropers appeals to the Buddhist 'tetralemma'. Whereas a dilemma confronts two apparently incompatible alternatives, a tetralemma envisages four stances on any controversial issue. Here the tetralemma is applied to the verbal aspect of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka:

1. *Position A* – that of the government and mainstream Sinhala parties (e.g., unitary state or moderate devolution only);
2. *Position B* – that of Tamil nationalist parties (e.g., high level of autonomy or separate state);
3. *Neither of these* – the position of civil society groups who say that the 'real problems' are not to do with elite power sharing but with remedying other unsatisfied needs (genuine democracy, development, good local government);
4. *Both of these* – the position of international peacemakers (compromise, genuine power sharing, federalism etc.).

This kind of approach is much needed in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan government's military victory if recurrence is to be avoided. But in intractable conflict it does not yet succeed. And one of the main reasons for this is that the phenomenon of radical disagreement is not represented on the complex systems map at all. It only appears when A and B are taken together in the dynamic clash of horizons that constitutes the war of words itself, as for example here:

- A. This blessed land will forever cherish, protect and value the fruits of the brave and courageous operation conducted by the Sri Lankan Security Forces to bring liberation to the people of the East, who for more than two decades were held hostage by the forces of vicious and violent terrorism. (M. Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka, 19 July 2007).
- B. We are at a crossroads in our freedom struggle. Our journey has been long and arduous, and crowded with difficult phases. We are facing challenges and unexpected turns that no other freedom movement had to face. The Sri Lankan government has split the Tamil homeland, set up military camps, bound it with barbed wire, and has converted it into a site of collective torture. (V. Pirapaharan, prominent Tamil Tiger Leader, 27 November 2006)

A radical disagreement is not monological, but polylogical. It is not a series of distinct and static 'positions' within a neutral 'third' space, but a ferocious battle of claim/counter-claim to occupy the whole of conceptual space.

And the same applies to third parties. Even would-be peacemakers also want to occupy the whole of conceptual space. They want to describe, explain – and transform – the discourses of the primary conflict parties so that they become something other than they were before. They want to win.

Radical disagreement does not appear in complex system maps, however subtle they may be. In a sense, this is because radical disagreements are too *simple* to be recognized within the definitions of complexity adopted by systems theory.

4. Why Is There No Theory of Radical Disagreement?

So far my search for an adequate theory of radical disagreement has returned empty-handed. I have yet to find a theory that survives the three adequacy tests. My interim conclusion, therefore, is that there is no such theory. There is no adequate third party account of the chief linguistic feature of intractable political conflict. There is no philosophy of radical disagreement.

Why is this? I have come to the view that the negative outcome of the search is the result of an underlying discrepancy between expert third party accounts in the social and political sciences in general and the nature of the phenomenon to be accounted for. The first is *monological*; the second is *polylogical*. And the monological cannot encompass the polylogical. Within monological theory, radical disagreement looks superficial and simplistic. But this superficiality and naivety can be seen as the trace of a different order of complexity. However great the differences described in monological theory (for example complexity theory), the differences revealed in the phenomenology of radical disagreement are greater than that (which is why they cannot be included in complex conflict maps). Radical disagreement is not a coexistence of equivalent subjectivities or rationalizations within some third or neutral conceptual space, however great the compulsion may be to suppose that it is. The war of words is a struggle to the death to occupy the whole of conceptual space – and act accordingly. It is a singularity in the universe of discourse (Ramsbotham, 2010, chap. 5). Where theory *does* encompass linguistic intractability is when it is itself convulsed by it – in other words when there is radical disagreement among theorists. But then, as the second adequacy test shows, this is not itself adequately described or accounted for in any one theory. The same applies *a fortiori* under the third adequacy test when theory is itself involved in intense political controversy.

As an example of the application of the second adequacy test, here is Michael Kelly's conclusion after studying the intense theoretical disputes between Habermas and Gadamer. On the Habermas/Gadamer disagreement Michael Kelly concludes:

The debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas had a rather ironic feature in that its path and conclusion seemed to contradict their

notions of philosophical discourse. The path did not conform to Habermas's notion of communicative action oriented to understanding, because Habermas's interest in the dialogue was admittedly to establish his differences with Gadamer and, as a result, his action in the debate was more instrumental than communicative; and the conclusion did not conform to Gadamer's notion of a dialogue that culminates in a fusion of horizons, for the two participants were farther apart at the end of the dialogue than they had been at the start. (Kelly, 1995: 139)

I suggest that this is not just a 'rather ironic feature' of a specific example of theoretical radical disagreement, but a feature of radical disagreement in general. The fact that in agonistic dialogue participants find that they are 'farther apart at the end of the dialogue than they had been at the start' is what exploration of radical disagreement with conflict parties repeatedly shows. Neither Habermas nor Gadamer take adequate discursive account of their own impassioned exchanges.

Turning to the third adequacy test, for Jacques Derrida, radical disagreement was dismissed as a discredited reflex of outmoded binary thinking. He regularly disparaged the clumsy eruptions of conflicting binaries and exposed their prior equivocated self-erasure in the very notion of iteration at the heart of 'writing'. He carried this over into his own ironic and self-concealing exchanges with John Searle, for example. But none of this affected the straightforward language he used when he was himself involved in direct political struggle and radical disagreement. Here, for example, Derrida scornfully refutes Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis, fiercely rejects the US-led reordering of global priorities after 1989, and calls for the setting up of a 'new International':

For it must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. (Derrida, 1994: 85)

Derrida's theoretical writings do not accommodate this – or even notice it.

5. Does This Matter?

In conclusion, does any of this matter? Even if there is no adequate theory of radical disagreement does this make any practical difference? I believe that it does matter and that it does make a difference.

We live in an irredeemably conflictual world. If there is no adequate theory of the chief linguistic feature of our most intense and intractable political conflicts, then we are going blind into our attempts to deal with them. Not only conflict parties, but third parties of all kinds – including would-be peacemakers – are basing their strategies and interventions on inadequate theoretical foundations. What would happen if they realized this? I think that it might induce a measure

Oliver Ramsbotham

of humility all round. But, more than that, I think that it would open up a range of other ways of engaging with intractable conflicts at all levels that are as yet not integrated into the conflict analysis and conflict resolution field. What are these other ways? I have tried to explore some of them elsewhere. But that is another story.

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Oliver Ramsbotham

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