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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

AREA #2

"COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT"

The study of communication in conflict has produced a large body of research and theory in recent decades, derived from diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives including anthropology, communication, economics, industrial relations, international relations, legal scholarship, management theory, political science, psychology, and sociology (see Kolb and Rubin, 1989, for a concise overview of the primary contributions of each of these fields to conflict mediation theory). Within this growing body of literature, the recognition that metaphors and interpretive frames play a crucial role in shaping both individual and collective perceptions of, attitudes toward, and responses to conflict has become a central insight among a number of theorists (Putnam and Holmer 1992; Littlejohn, Shailor et al. 1994).

The many metaphors and frames that have been applied to conflict have, in turn, been conceptualized by conflict theorists in a variety of ways (Sandole 1993; Folger and Bush 1994). Economists and mathematicians, for instance, often employ a "game" metaphor that conceptualizes conflicting parties as liberal/individual agents interacting in instrumentally rational ways (Heap and Varoufakis 1995; Romp 1997). In contrast, from a more humanistic perspective, Wilmot and Hocker categorize diverse conflict metaphors according to whether they limit, are neutral toward, or expand conflict potential (1998). For the purpose of this comprehensive examination, conflict metaphors and frames will be broadly categorized according to whether the type of communicative actions that they suggest are predominantly adversarial/oppositional or cooperative/interdependent (Ross 1993; Tjosvold and Vliert 1994; Schweitzer 1996). On the one hand, conflict can be framed in an oppositional manner that suggests the appropriateness of adversarial, or what some theorists have even described as violent, communicative action (Bode 1997). "Conflict as war" is an example of a metaphor that would be typically associated with this frame. On the other hand, conflict can alternatively be framed in a manner that suggests the appropriateness of non-adversarial communicative action (Tannen 1998). "Conflict as collective problem solving" is an example of a metaphor that would be typically associated with this latter frame.

With this broad distinction established, this comprehensive examination will primarily focus on the latter of these two approaches to conflict, which will be mapped out according to the following scheme: first, three distinct theoretical dimensions of communication in conflict will be considered; next, two closely related theoretical frameworks for communicating in conflict will be examined; and finally, theories regarding two distinct forms of third-party communicative intervention in conflict will be considered.

The three dimensions of conflict that have been extensively examined within non-adversarial theoretical frameworks are relationships, perspectives, and values. These

relationships are assumed to be primarily defined by interdependence, which is viewed as a basic factor in both the genesis and resolution of human conflict (Broome 1993; Jones 1994). On the epistemological level, human perspectives on reality are viewed as inherently limited yet extremely diverse – another basic factor in both the genesis and resolution of human conflicts (Smith 1997; Young 1997). And on the axiological level, humans are understood to be fundamentally motivated by underlying and often poorly identified values, needs, or interests – a final basic factor in both the genesis and resolution of human conflicts (Amy 1987; Fisher, Ury et al. 1991; Etzioni 1996; McDonald 1998).

Two non-adversarial frameworks for communicating in conflict have, in turn, been extensively theorized by conflict and communication scholars. These are frequently labeled dialogue and deliberation. While these terms have been used interchangeably by some, and indeed they are closely related, they are defined here according to the widely recognized distinctions outlined below. First, dialogue has generally been theorized as an informal and often ongoing framework for the exchange of diverse perspectives and the consideration of diverse values. In contrast to adversarial frameworks such as partisan debate, however, dialogue is generally conceived of in terms of non-confrontational relationships between its participants, in which each makes a genuine effort to understand, rather than belittle, the perspectives and values of the others, in order to expand their own understandings and empathies in accordance with the epistemological and axiological assumptions discussed above (Amy 1983; Bohm 1997). Mutual understanding and empathy are thus the ultimate purpose of dialogue. Deliberation, in turn, is often understood as an adaptation of the general principles of dialogue for the more specific or instrumental purpose of arriving at a decision or adopting a course of action. As such, deliberation is often characterized by greater attention to procedural norms and often occurs within a finite time frame. Again, however, it is characterized by an exchange of perspectives and values in the context of mutually interdependent relationships (Bridges 1994; Dillon 1994; Genelot 1994).

Finally, two distinct forms of third-party communicative intervention in conflict have received considerable theoretical attention in recent years. The first of these is the professional, or least professed, practice of conflict mediation. The second is the largely unprofessed, but highly ubiquitous, practice of media intervention in conflict. These two forms of third-party intervention have important commonalities as well as differences, and an insightful body of theory has emerged recently in an effort to understand these. For instance, both forms of intervention engage in third-party framing, or reframing, of conflicts with significant potential consequences for the development of the conflicts themselves (Donohue, Allen et al. 1985; Tankard, Hendrickson et al. 1991). In addition, the practitioners of both forms of intervention have much to gain, as third parties, from the conflicts of others (Arno 1984). On the other hand, the expressed goals of most conflict mediators are to assist in the constructive resolution of conflicts and/or the constructive transformation of parties to conflicts. Accordingly, their third-party interests in conflict – both material and humanitarian – are only realized to the degree that they meet these goals (Bush and Folger 1994; Menkel-Meadow 1995). The goals and interests of the media, however, are more ambiguous in this regard. Many theorists (and media critics) assert that the material interests of the media are aligned with the perpetuation of conflict (Douglas 1992). Others, in an attempt to bridge the normative divide between conflict mediation theory and mass media practice, argue that the media do have material interests in finding more constructive ways of covering conflict – but these interests have been eclipsed by traditional media assumptions and practices that underestimate the public's desire and capacity for more constructive forms of coverage (Rubenstein, Botes et al. 1994). A final and closely related distinction between the third-party interventions of mediators and the

problem solving (Fisher and Brown 1988). On the other hand, most commercial media have traditionally framed conflict in highly oppositional and antagonistic terms (Arno 1984). Again, however, recent efforts to reconceptualize the media's orientation to conflict suggests at least the possibility that non-adversarial formulas for coverage of conflict may not only be more socially constructive (Yankelovitch 1991; Fishkin 1995), but may even be economically viable (Rosen 1996).

Concluding note: While not a major theme of this comprehensive examination, it should also be noted that scholarship itself can be understood as another form of third-party intervention in conflict. For instance, scholarly "interventions" in the field of conflict and alternative dispute resolution have been employed within projects of legal and judicial reform, social transformation and community empowerment, and psychotherapy and self-actualization. The professionalization, commodification, and export of expertise in the field of conflict resolution can also, in itself, be seen as a form of third-party intervention, into which both idealistic and materialistic interests can be read, and which warrants further critical inquiry itself (see Avruch and Black, 1996, for a brief anthropological consideration of some of these issues from an interesting and yet somewhat ironic perspective).

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1 The term "breakdown in communication" has entered popular explanations of the causes/engines of conflict. How often do theorists use this kind of explanation, why, and how successfully? Does it imply, when used (in both popular and academic thought) that communication does not play a role in communication except in its absence ("breakdown"). If this is so, what does it reveal about the presumption of communication's role in social (and conflictual) life? Are there good cases where this kind of analysis (the breakdown explanation) is appropriate? Where do such theories about the breakdown of communication fit into the whole atlas of theorizing about communication in conflict? What might be some 'reasons' for which these theories came into circulation and were successful in the first place?

2 Your position paper proposes an opposition between frames which are broadly adversarial and those which are broadly interdependent (you also say cooperative). Is there a group of cases [even case studies?] in which this opposition is neutralized, in which the frames which are BOTH broadly adversarial AND cooperative. Is it possible - on a higher level of abstraction - that political-economy of 'the world system' entails the pursuit of BOTH adversarial AND cooperating relations, thus producing both conflict and the framework to limit it. If this might be even partially true, might the ambiguous role you detect among media (incl their role for conlfict intervention in specific instances) be better understood? If it is not partially true, must the BOTH/AND logic be discarded? [As you can see this question is open-ended]

3 I paraphrase your position paper:"the professionalization, commodification, and export of expertise in conflict resolution [and analysis]...can, in itself, be seen as a form of structural adjustment between supply and demand for thought and research about conflict." I invite you to think of the demand-side for a moment, say since 1945. You may limit yourself to the countries and cultures and situations you know best; can "both idealistic and materialistic interests" be read into the demands for expertise as well as the supply of it? Can specialties in conflict studies be understood as an academic/intellectual supply and demand adjustment [do you see in the current literature you have now read the lineage-geneology of these specialties]. Since the big change in Europe (and thus the cold war) of about 1989-90, have we seen such structural adjustments? Have we focused too much in our analysis on the supply of ideas/evidence, and not enough on the demand for it (or absence of demand) ?

4 Analysis of "deliberation" (in which I include all strands of negotiation) focuses largely on technique, timing, and territories. Do you think this kind of focus is partially due to the heavily normative expectations surrounding research/writing in this field? Should we look beyond these limits to the influence of "luck",the sheer passage of time,