

Towards a Dialogical Model of Conflict Resolution

SÉAMUS A. POWER

University of Cambridge

The purpose of this article is to form the basis for a dialogical model of conflict resolution, by extending the work published by Tileagă in 2007. Its value, then, is to provide a basis for further research in the area of intergroup conflict by moving beyond a linear model to a dialogical one, where description of behaviour gives way to its motivations and functions. A dialogical model is necessary to understand intergroup conflict as all groups exist and relate to each other within shifting contexts. The theory predicts two outcomes of dialogical interaction between groups. Firstly, further 'dialogical divergence' may occur from perceived dehumanizing discourse and acts between groups. 'Dialogical convergence' is identified as the second umbrella process, through which groups can potentially engage more peacefully with one another.

In Power (2011, this edition) I argue for the necessity of understanding intergroup conflict outside the laboratory (as well as inside it) – between real social groups. This theorizing is based in Bruner's (1990) second cognitive revolution aimed to re-situate social psychological research into a socio-cultural context. Although advances have been made in understanding intergroup relations, such studies remain the minority. Social psychological findings can significantly inform meaningful policies to reduce intergroup violence between conflicting social groups, but more research is needed to understand this on a real social level.

This article aims to theoretically advance previous research undertaken by Tileagă (2007) which situates dehumanization, delegitimization and depersonalization as processes constructed via discourse and socially situated. After providing an overview of Tileagă's paper, I will illustrate how the relationship between conflicting groups in a socio-cultural context is dialogical, not linear. In order to do this I will re-interpret interview data provided by Tileagă based on interviews with a group of 38 Romanian professionals (the majority group) about the Romani population (the minority group).

The Romani people are Europe's largest ethnic minority; estimates of their population range between ten to twelve million (European Commission, 2004). Historically they have experienced discrimination, segregation and persecution, which have continued through to the present across a variety of European Union countries, and also beyond Europe's boundaries. They are a socially excluded group and are negatively stereotyped throughout the European Union as being 'dirty, lazy, thieves' (Ethnobarometer, 2000, quoted in Tileagă, 2007, p.723). They experience discrimination on a political level propagated through negative media reports and

are subject to hate-speeches and violence which is often slow to be condemned on a political level (ERRC, 2010). The discrimination and social exclusion of the Roma are of interest from a social psychological perspective, to understand the processes that both cause and maintain this dynamic. Tileagă's (2007) research used discourse from a group of professional Romanian people about the Roma minority to understand how discourse functioned to depersonalize, dehumanize and delegitimize the Romani people.

Tileagă's (2007) article, entitled 'Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization' aims to re-situate these psychological phenomena away from the traditional research paradigm to understand them as they exist within a social context. To do this, he uses data from a series of 38 interviews conducted with middle-class Romanians about the Roma people in Romania. His qualitative analysis aims to situate these processes as social practices, bound to constructions of morality to understand how discourse from the majority group (the Romanian professionals) situate the minority group (Romanies) as depersonalized, delegitimized and dehumanized and thus how they are positioned outside the boundaries of morality.

Tileagă (2007) conceptualizes dehumanization as an extreme form of depersonalization, where individuals and their group can lie outside the boundaries of both humanity and morality. Delegitimization, as defined by Tileagă, is a 'social psychological process that permits moral exclusion'. He draws on Bar Tal (1989, in Tileagă, 2007) and adds that it is an extreme case of categorization where an outgroup is not only negatively stereotyped, but it is located outside the boundaries of societal norms; it lies outside the realm of what it means to be human.

Tileagă aims to re-conceptualize experimentally based understandings of the social psychological processes causing depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization. In a detailed theoretical introduction, he strives to re-orientate these processes away from reductionist accounts of intergroup behaviour, towards describing how these phenomena can be constructed via discourse. By conceptualizing dehumanization as occurring in the social realm, Tileagă shifts the research focus on this phenomenon towards a social constructivist perspective. From this theoretical framework, Tileagă argues that the discourse of the majority group is influenced by their social position and the media, both of which are situated in a historical and cultural context. The relationship between this context and the majority group is linear: the latter are solely informed by the context in which they are embedded.

I commend Tileagă's re-situation of depersonalization, dehumanization and delegitimization as socially constructed processes. It is important to understand how these processes are created, recreated and transmitted through everyday discourse to situate a minority group as laying outside the boundaries of humanity and morality. Deducing a theoretical strand from Tileagă's article would suggest a linear relationship to this construction of this minority outgroup. However, as will

be argued in this article, the conclusions drawn from Tileagă's research can be extended by conceptualizing the relationships between the two groups as dialogical (Bell and Gardiner, 1998; Markova, 2003). In order to understand social 'processes' (as Tileagă aims to do) it is important to understand how these processes work *between* groups rather than just from the perspective of one group. A dialogical framework examines the two-way interaction between groups, and has the potential to understand social psychological processes in a more comprehensive way than a linear model.

Through a critique of Tileagă's study, I aim to propose an alternative (dialogical) model for future research concerned with conceptualizing how groups involved in socially constructed processes such as dehumanization, depersonalization and delegitimization can be best understood. A dialogical model of intergroup engagement aims to understand the relationship *between* groups, specifically between conflicting groups. In order to understand the motivations behind both discourse and actions from one group towards the other, it is necessary to understand the relationship as a two-way process where one group's discourse and actions inform the discourse and actions of the other group and vice versa. By understanding the causes of one group's behavior (i.e. as a response to the behavior of the other group) the potential to understand the motivations and functions behind the response increases. In Power and Peterson (2011, this edition), for example, it is shown how the discourse between Israeli and Palestinian authorities is dialogical. The interaction of one group in relation to the other is motivated to legitimize the actions of the ingroup, and functions to present the ingroup in the best possible terms from their perspective to their intended audience. The functions and motivation in dialogical relationships are informed by the historical, cultural, political and social fabric in which the groups are embedded and these ideologies are often communicated through the mass media. By understanding intergroup conflict through a dialogical framework there is the potential to understand how the relationship between conflicting groups can change. 'Dialogical divergence' is an overarching term I use to mean the myriad ways in which engagement between groups can lead to increased (and violent) conflict. On the other hand, the opposing umbrella term - 'dialogical convergence' - is a term I use to conceptualize the ways in which groups can engage more positively and co-operate with each other.

This type of dialogical theorizing is informed by, and elaborates upon, experimental research on intergroup relations. Justification for its usefulness lies in its potential to bridge the gap between theory and 'real-world', and thus has potential to inform policy concerned with resolving conflict. The remainder of this article examines Tileagă's (2007) research, with the ultimate goal of extrapolating a dialogical rather than a linear model of intergroup engagement.

REVIEWING THE REVIEW

Theories of Dehumanization

Tileagă's literature review aims to position dehumanizing phenomena in a social realm, via a discursive psychological framework, at the expense of other theories. Here I suggest that some conclusions that Tileagă draws from his literature review are untenable, and diminish the possibility of theoretical integration and possible elaboration, which is how scientific knowledge develops (Berger and Zelditch, 1993).

Tileagă challenges the merits of the concept of 'ontologization' put forth by Social Representations theorists to explain dehumanization. The concept assumes that some groups are more discriminated against than others. The theory of social representations holds that majority groups can position minorities outside the realm of humanity by using animalistic discourse. This functions to take away their human rights, and the group becomes delegitimized.

Tileagă critiques this approach, arguing that the concept of 'ontologization' is rooted "in terms of a majority/minority dichotomy, social influence, social cognition and representational processes" (p. 719, line 24/25). Tileagă's critique should take note of the important structural debate within Social Representations Theory (SRT). The issue of dialogicality in forming representations is becoming hugely important within the theory (Markova, 2003; Liu, 2005). He has overlooked a potential hybrid of this dialogicalism with minority group dehumanization. In this sense, he acknowledges the necessity of studying group formation through analysis of dialogue within the social realm, but fails to see the potential to integrate concepts with discursive psychology within a dialogical framework.

The Concept of Morality

In order to understand how minority groups are delegitimized, Tileagă introduces the concept of morality. Accepted moral practice draws a boundary, the author suggests, where one group can position itself as legitimate; this is the ingroup. As a consequence, the outgroup is positioned outside this boundary; they are abnormal and 'other'. Tileagă aims to explore how the discourse from the majority group accomplishes this positioning and how it is created within a socio-political context.

I propose that dialogical theorizing can advance these efforts. The introduction of the idea of 'morality' seems to warrant elaboration. What does a moral boundary mean, and in what ways have previous researchers thought about this concept? A weakness throughout Tileagă's paper is that morality is defined from the particular perspective of the ingroup. The concept of 'morality' plays a central role in Tileagă's interpretation of his interview transcripts. He quotes Opatow, stating that "moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules and considerations of fairness apply*" (cited in Tileagă,

2007, pp. 720-721, italics in original). If morality is a difference between what is thought of as being 'good or bad, or perhaps 'right or wrong', then I probe further and ask: 'Morality in whose eyes?' Tileagă's use of a monological (linear) model appears to be a major limitation, as he views morality as being solely constructed by the majority. In doing this, a skewed interpretation of the interview data and the events they describe is created, distancing the applicability of theory to practice. Why not also look at the discourse from minorities, and constructions of morality from their perspective? Considering data from two or more groups allows the social researcher to move beyond description to understand functions and motivations of each groups' discourse and actions in relation to the other groups' (Moscovici, 2008; Power and Peterson, 2011, this edition).

The work of Shweder (1991), whose anthropological studies situate issues of morality within a cultural context, could be employed to further conceptualize how groups understand constructions of moral values. A reading of Shweder would inform a more insightful analysis as he describes how 'morality' is only morality from a particular *perspective*. Shweder cites the example of widows in India not eating fish (which is believed to arouse sexual desire) when a widow is supposed to mourn the death of her husband. However, a widow in Western society is allowed to eat fish: it is not immoral. Mapping this idea onto the Tileagă study implies a different notion of 'morality', and exclusion from it. As such, 'morality' for one group is not the same for another. It can thus be seen how the Romanies might construct their own 'morality' which is perfectly legitimate for them, where they are 'located' and 'positioned' as the ingroup. It is when morality is constructed as definite, from the perspective of the majority, that it can be seen how some people or groups become 'delegitimate'. SRT is based on explaining knowledge construction and use and, as such, has the potential for a 'moral dimension'. Tileagă sensitizes Social Representations theorists to the potential for exploring constructions of moralities from differing group perspectives. What Tileagă puts forward as 'moral exclusion' is a socio-cognitive construction, whose genealogy can also be explored via SRT. A particular focus on literature surrounding 'morality' would have been more beneficial to understand the process of delegitimization.

Future research focusing on understanding intergroup conflict would benefit from conceptualizing groups, and the phenomena they create, as dialogical. A dialogical framework aims to understand the processes between groups; how they relate to one another within situated contexts. Understanding psychological phenomena, which either proliferates violent conflict or prevents its resolution is of utmost importance to generate ideas to reduce it.

THE ANALYSIS

Tileagă's analysis examines the discursive ways in which depersonalization, dehumanization and delegitimization of the Roma minority occurs. I argue that a more in-depth way of interpreting these social phenomena can be extrapolated from

Thematic Analysis using a dialogical framework. Therefore, I not only critique the method of analysis used, but offer an alternative conceptualization of the design. I reinterpret some passages in light of this alternative approach and argue that conclusions drawn from this type of analysis extend the original ones offered by Tileagă.

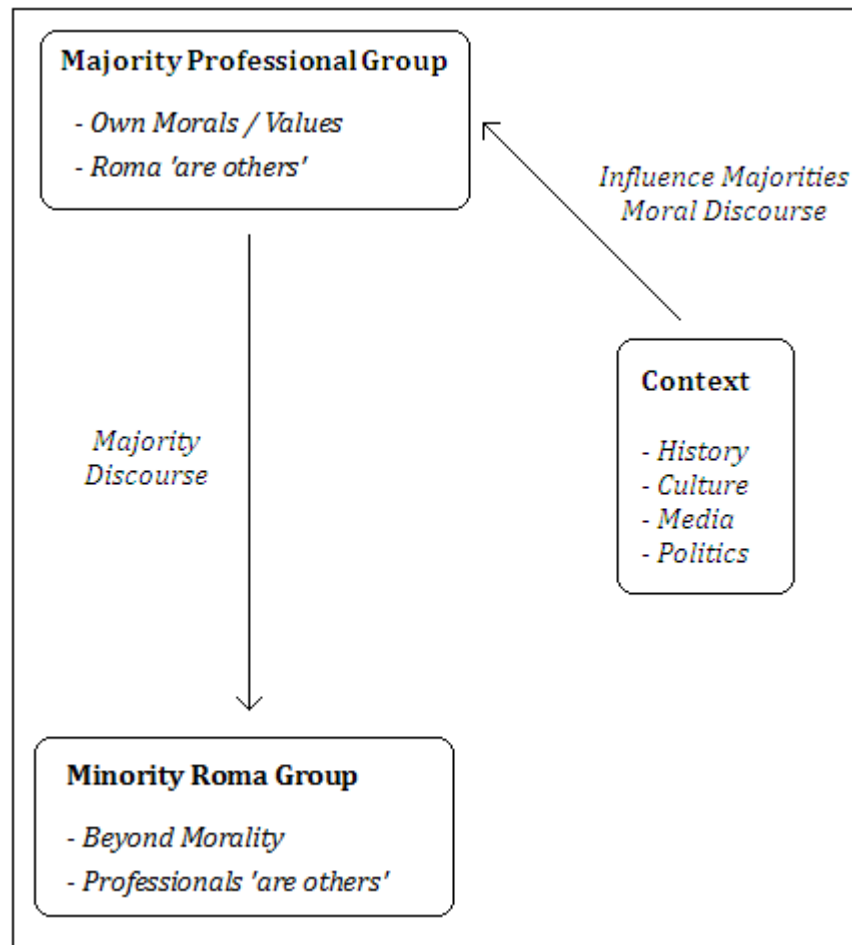


Figure 1. Tileagă's Interpretative Model

Figure 1 shows the model that Tileagă employs in his paper to re-conceptualize the way minorities can become depersonalized, dehumanized and delegitimized. Cultural, historical and political factors, communicated through the mass media, inform majority group (the professional Romanians) discourse regarding the minority group (the Romani people). They position themselves within the boundaries of morality; they are the ingroup. By positioning themselves as such, the Romanian professionals can (from their perspective) legitimize the creation of an outgroup (i.e. the minority Romanies). Unlike the morally good ingroup, the

Romanians are 'other' and, by extension, are immoral, and can be spoken about as being non-human.

Although this model has the benefit of being sensitive to a larger social context, it is incomplete: the model is linear and, as a consequence, the conclusions drawn are overly simple. His study shows how the processes of depersonalization, dehumanization and delegitimization are discursively constructed, and it is important to remember that this was Tileagă's aim. I extend his research to understand intergroup relations from a dialogical perspective to understand how conflicting groups can converge or diverge further, and therefore add further depth through re-analysis of Tileagă's interview data. The monological and linear conceptualization of intergroup processes do not adequately explain how groups can resolve conflict by identifying processes to understand one another; nor does it allow conceptual space to theorize ways in which conflict can escalate. This is the ambition of a dialogical model which is presented in *Figure 2*.

or discourse from either group have the potential to further distance one group from another. This 'dialogical divergence' might then lead to actual acts of violence or annihilation as evidenced in some real-life intergroup (and interstate) conflicts.

The alternative direction entails increased understanding between both groups. The diagram illustrates how this 'dialogical convergence' is possible via perceiving and recognizing the other group (as each group is 'other' to the other). These processes open up a space in which conflict has the potential to be resolved through meaningful acts and discourse from both of the conflicting groups. Groups can 'become other' (Gillespie, 2006a; Wagoner and Kadianaki, 2007). O'Sullivan (2011, this edition) argues that the counter strategy – 'dialogical divergence' – has received most empirical attention. However, the opposite process – 'dialogical convergence' – where conflicting groups can engage in a more meaningful and transformative way, has received relatively less empirical research. There is huge potential not only to understand the processes that separate groups, but also to identify social psychological processes that allow groups to converge with the aim of increasing co-operation and reducing conflict.

Gillespie (2006a) theorizes how this becomes possible by interpreting the discourse of both tourists in Ladakh and the local Ladakhi people, who shared various symbolic resources such as photography. Gillespie (2006b) illustrates how self/other positions can collapse through a process entitled 'identification through differentiation'. This theoretical process is borne out of dialogical theorizing, where there is a counter dynamic for the tendency to create (and, by extension, dehumanize) others. The conceptualization of intergroup conflict presented in Figure 2, allows one group to 'become other': there is a possibility, albeit paradoxically, for a majority group to identify with the minority group.

Further expanding on Tileagă's approach, a dialogical model emphasizes that the relationship between both groups and the context in which they are situated is similarly dialogical. The (future) actions and discourse both by and between each group, has the possibility to influence the context, as society is constructed by people (Bruner, 1990). Therefore the social, cultural, historical and political context in which people live is fluid, malleable and changeable, according to the actions of all social groups. The media play an important role in (in-) forming ingroups and outgroups (see Power and Peterson, 2011, this edition) and, therefore, are an integral part of a dialogical model of conflict resolution.

The proposed dialogical approach moves beyond description and explains dehumanizing discourse by exploring its functions and motivations. Through a dialogical analysis it can be revealed how the discourse or actions from one group influence the response of the other. This is arguably more appropriate, as it creates a greater theoretical understanding of intergroup conflict, where more peaceful co-existence might be generated (e.g. Gillespie, 2006b; Moghaddam, 2008).

The Use of Thematic Analysis

I propose that the method of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) would be more appropriate than conversational analysis in re-conceptualizing the ways in which extreme prejudice forms minority dehumanization. Thematic analysis would extract themes from the text, and illustrate the ways in which the professional Romanians speak about the Romanies. Tileagă is motivated to provide examples of what he considers extreme discourse so thematic analysis would be advantageous in exploring all links between interviewees' discourse regarding the minority group. It would provide more examples of different kinds of discourse, and should allow for a more informative analysis that is situated in the text.

In the study, Tileagă interviews 38 people, for over an hour each, but provides extracts from only four. These extracts are interpreted as being representative of discourse that illustrates depersonalization, dehumanization and delegitimization. Because the interviewer focuses on such a subgroup from an already precisely snowballed group, the sample is homologous, as all the extracts focus on negative experiences. Tileagă interprets this text as constituting Roma immorality as being 'dislocated' or 'out of place' with regard to the boundaries of morality but this is analyzed from the majority's perspective only. The design is similar to Verkuyten (2001), who illustrates the ways in which ethnically Dutch inhabitants in Rotterdam construct ethnically minority residents as 'abnormal'; the minority group lay outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior – they are potentially dehumanized. The question then is whether they actually are dehumanized. A dialogical model opens up more space to conceptualize further social psychological processes leading to dehumanization, and therefore creates a better understanding of intergroup conflict.

A thematic analysis could have been employed to extract themes from the text, including themes that seemingly do not resonate with the processes of dehumanization. This would allow for an interpretation that illustrates how the professionals came to speak about the Romanies as dehumanized, rather than explain the actual ways their discourse illustrates this. This would account for the origins of how these participants came to 'talk' about the Romanies which would add more depth to Tileagă's argument.

Dialogical Re-Interpretation of Tileagă's data

In this section I re-analyze the extracts used by Tileagă from a dialogical perspective in order to illuminate some of the theoretical points I have made throughout this article. My re-interpretation is limited to the extracts Tileagă uses in his study. However, I believe that the content is sufficient to illustrate the usefulness of an expansive dialogical model. I suggest that a dialogical framework of intergroup engagement would be more appropriate to analyze intergroup processes and, consequently, give a more holistic account of minority depersonalization, dehumanization and delegitimization.

Sandra – a 51 year old speech therapist – was invited to speak about Romanian ‘society and its actors’ (Tileagă, 2007). Here is part of her response to this invitation:

“I have brought them a sack of nice clothes, they were walking in rags. I have given them nice clothes, I have brought them a bag of food ... just to see the next day the nice clothes I had given them to wear, to get changed, if I had stayed with them they would have changed clothes, if not they would have thrown them into the garbage container ... Why do they behave like this? It means they like living in dirt, in dirt, through theft.” (Extract 2, lines 411-419, p. 726).

This extract could be read as an illustration of the dialogical tensions between both groups. Sandra’s discourse reveals she initially tried to help the Roma minority (‘I have brought them a sack of nice clothes’), but this help was unwelcome and rejected (they’ve ‘thrown them into the garbage’). This rejection informs Sandra’s opinion of the Roma (‘they like living in dirt’). It is in the interaction between the groups where the researcher can move beyond description and explore explanations of conflicting behaviours.

It seems as though the rejection of help is a rejection of the majority’s moral values. The act of giving clothes and food constructs the majority’s ‘moral dimensions’. They are helpful, civilized and thus ‘good.’ The rejection of this helps to construct the ‘moral boundaries’ of the Romanies. They are considered ‘dirt,’ ‘thieves’ and ‘other’. Examining the rejection of help and the subsequent synthesis of diverging moral boundaries, explains the origin of the distancing of the minority from the majority ‘other’. I elaborate upon this idea by interpreting discourse by Carla who says:

“They don’t have the desire, I don’t think they are accepting...they don’t like to work, ... they don’t own land to cultivate, to farm and when they were offered a place to stay or something, I saw it on television, that they put their horses in even if they were flats ... they ruin, so they don’t respect, that’s the thing.” (Extract 3, lines 80-95, p. 728).

Carla hints at some interesting facets of Roma life that Tileagă fails to explore. The Romani’s perspective on property, land ownership and towards work suggests something about their way of life and about some of the ways their moral values differ from those of the majority. It is interesting to note that these moral values are communicated through the mass media; Carla ‘saw it on the television’. I suggest that the imposing of the majority group’s ‘moral ideology’ onto the Romani people is what positions them as ‘dehumanized’. The ‘destruction’ by the Roma is an act of rebellion – a rejection of what the majority calls ‘civilization,’ – and it is through these acts the minorities are manifesting and forming their own ‘oral dimension’. In this way, imposing ‘civilization’ upon the Romani people and their adamant rejection of it can be read in a dialogical sense. One group puts forward a version of ‘moral life’; the ‘other’ rejects it. This rejection informs the perspective of the initial group and their further treatment of the minority and also solidifies the ingroup cohesion of the minority group. It is through an understanding of the moral values

of the 'other', as Shweder meant it, that greater understanding of the dehumanizing process can occur.

If Tileagă were to adopt the model I proposed, then the claims he makes towards the end of his analysis would be substantiated and more grounded in the text than they currently are. For instance, Alina's assertion of, 'what can society do for them? They are the scum of society' (Extract 5, lines 428-431, p. 731) is interpreted by Tileagă as being an exemplar of the most extreme dehumanizing discourse. The word 'scum' resonates with her use of 'rats' (Alina, extract 4, line 422, p.730), and these adjectives place the Romanies 'outside' the moral realm; they are 'animalistic', 'other' and dehumanized.

Tileagă leaps from dehumanization of the minority to their annihilation with the sentence 'whilst the consequences of Romani behaviour and way of being are (made) problematic, the consequence of this problematic 'eliminationist' categorization are not' (p. 731, lines 23/24). Although previous research has looked at the linkages between extreme dehumanization and annihilation (as cited in Perez, Moscovici and Chulvi, 2007) the author fails to detail any work in this area. While Bruner asserted, 'what people say is just as important as what they do' (1990), there is not sufficient support within the discourse to suggest a leap from dehumanization to violent annihilation of this dehumanized group. The interviewees in Tileagă's study do not discuss actual violence against minorities. None of the professionals give examples, either from personal experience or with reference to other professionals they know, or media reports that allude to violence initiated by the Romanian majority.

As I suggested earlier, a thematic analysis on all the transcript data would have revealed any notion of violent acts against the minority. In the extracts Tileagă analyzes, most of the violent acts are perpetrated by the Roma. As such, the authors' interpretation is ungrounded in the text. I acknowledge that dehumanization could potentially lead to ethnic cleansing of minorities but I am unconvinced that the transcript data supports this linkage, rendering Tileagă's interpretation of this point untenable. The model I present suggests a potential space beyond dehumanization (i.e. as a consequence of further dialogical divergence) for violence against both groups to occur, but I fail to see concrete evidence from the text which suggests this is the case. In order to understand intergroup conflict from a social psychological perspective it is necessary for theoretical advances to be supported by sufficient data.

CONCLUSION

Tileagă re-conceptualizes the research concerned with depersonalization dehumanization and delegitimization as dynamic processes which are socially situated, but fails to see how these processes are dialogical. I conclude that the line of research studying these discursive processes is promising, but in the current theoretical state is at risk of becoming overly simplified. To understand morality,

and displacement outside of its perceived boundaries, a dialogical framework can be used. By looking at how one group responds to the discourse or acts of another group, it is possible to understand the motivations behind the response. In this way, it is possible to see how conceptualizations of a social construction (e.g. morality) change over time.

Although dialogical theorizing is advancing, methodologies to accompany this theorizing are under-developed (Gillespie and Cornish, 2010). The theoretical ideas presented throughout this article need to be advanced through further theoretical development and empirical testing. The potential to understand intergroup conflict will be greatly advanced when a range of methodologies are available to research how these groups 'dialogically converge' or 'dialogically diverge'.

Tileagă's (2007) original article used discourse from one group referring to another group, and the dialogical model I present examines the relationship between two groups. However, a more complete and possibly more implementable dialogical theory of conflict resolution would be able to examine the relationships between multiple groups. This would reflect the 'real world' to a greater extent, where, for example, the role of the United States influences the conflict between Palestine and Israel (Power and Peterson, 2011, this edition).

A dialogical model of intergroup conflict can have implications on both micro and macro levels. It has the potential to see how conflicting groups can diverge further, leading from possible depersonalization to dehumanization, and perhaps to violent annihilation. There also lies the potential for conflicting groups to converge; to recognize and take the perspective of the other group. This direction has received less empirical investigation. Future research should note that conflict and cooperation are inextricably linked. A dialogical model of conflict resolution has the potential to assist with understanding how these processes are connected and how and meaningful contextualized engagement can occur. Of course the ideas expressed within this paper need to be developed, altered, or refuted. Its benefit would be to illuminate how groups (or individuals or states) (mis)-understand each other, to predict whether further divergence or convergence will occur. By understanding the ways conflicting groups both diverge and converge, through a dialogical framework, there exists the potential to generate meaningful policies to promote intergroup cooperation.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Séamus Power has a Masters of Philosophy in Social and Developmental Psychology from the University of Cambridge. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in Applied Psychology from University College Cork. When he is not studying, he travels extensively; informing his academic interests of identity, conflict and beauty. E-mail seamus.a.power@gmail.com