

# Preface

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Radical thinking as a child was very natural for me. According to some educators and psychologists, this is normal and one of the reasons children are so creative in comparison to older generations. Even if they are aware, children tend to be detached from the foundations and roots that cause a phenomenon and the realm of possibilities in the empirical world. Consequently, children can think of drastically different ways of being such as hoping they can fly when they get older or explaining childbirth to themselves as a result of mommy eating too much. And when confronted with the laws, norms, and environmental limitations of their society and their world, there seems to be a dominant trend across cultures for children to ask: why? Why does something have to work in a certain way? Why can't it work in this other way? Whereas many children are socialized out of such critical thinking, interrogating the reason(s) of a claim, position, action, reaction, process, or system is something I thoroughly enjoy and prioritize to this day. Additionally, I systematically ask why individuals and groups behave as they do when often we get distracted by focusing on their actions alone. I live and breathe asking why. In fact, I genuinely believe like many others do, that without answering why something is the case, the rest of our experiences of that thing remain superficial as we have yet to understand the reason(s) it exists in its current form.

Among adults, we see a dominant trend across cultures to accept or become increasingly ignorant about why their societies function as they do and instead, the focus turns toward figuring out *what* to do and *how* to be to survive and/or thrive in the status quo. But, in the twenty-first century and specifically during the recent pandemic, calls for a new world order and completely different ways of organizing social, economic, and political life require that we confront why relevant systems exist in their current form. And as the answers become visible including

assumptions, beliefs, and histories upon which current systems rest, fundamentally different foundations can be intentionally designed. However, this radical way of thinking, which necessarily engages the root of something or someone, is not normalized in many spaces and I have experienced this firsthand.

I do not see the value of research and the academy if not helping to increase the quality of life for the masses, which often marginalizes me as an "idealist" or "too much of a practitioner" in the theoretical realm. When practicing in my field, I often call for a pause, to reflect and theorize how to improve approaches to violence prevention, which in the hustle of the everyday in the practical realm is a laughable luxury only academics and researchers enjoy. But I ask why this is not a mandatory part of practice in the interest of harm reduction? My masters thesis focused on understanding the utility of international criminal justice for conflict affected populations, which to the orthodoxy is beyond the scope of what international criminal justice should concern itself. But to me the purpose of international criminal justice should and arguably is in theory, to serve affected populations and protect them from predatory governance systems. When developing my doctoral thesis, I was looking to redefine what "transitional justice" means in accordance with conflict affected populations' views. But I had to justify why my resultant and fundamentally different definition should still be considered "transitional justice", whereas I would ask, why wouldn't it be if affected populations defined it as such?

When engaging the international atrocities prevention community, I asked why there would be irreconcilable differences between organizations given that diplomacy and conflict management is part and parcel to what these actors "teach" others to disallow

## Preface

the conditions for atrocities to unfold. In the systems dynamics community, I asked why there could be silos, dividing “hard systems thinkers” from “soft systems thinkers”, when most, if not all systems theorists work so hard to show the value of understanding all parts of a system and their relationships to each other. Why not apply this appreciation for all parts of a system to the systems dynamics community itself?

At every turn, I am constantly asking why something is the case. And consequently, I rarely feel as if I belong and often, I am not accepted as someone who “gets it” or I am easily dismissed as “radical”, which means I am thinking and behaving in ways that do not fit within mainstream parameters. These reactions tell me that there is discomfort in understanding the purpose(s) of our actions and even resistance to changing said purpose(s) where necessary. But confrontation with why something is the case does not necessitate that we change the answers. We could also find a mismatch between the purpose(s) a person or something (e.g., machine) seeks to achieve and how they operate, making the latter a possible site for change. Yet asking such foundational questions at all can be problematized as a waste of time, idealistic, or “too philosophical” as to some the answers might be “too difficult” or even “impossible” to address.

These experiences caused in me a healthy frustration with the lack of will in the everyday to engage foundational questions that necessarily ask why something is the case. I believe we should be continuously asking why human beings and the world around us appear in their current forms. This is because to build societies that can manage conflict non-violently and in turn become more peaceful, at times, we must understand and change the fundamental causes of our systems’ and our own behaviors, which radical thinking encourages and, in some situations, necessitates. In addition, if we understand and accept the purpose(s) our governance systems must fulfil, then we can change what they look like and how they operate to graph on to how our societies evolve without losing governance systems’ essential functions. In light of these analytical benefits, the Radical Review is meant to normalize asking why as this is the starting point for the types of social and societal transformation that even beneficiaries of the status quo across contexts are calling for in a Covid-regulated world. Radical change requires radical thinking, where asking why is embedded in the process of understanding.

The hope is that in this edition of Radical Review, the contributors demonstrate the utility of radical thought to advance non-violent approaches to governance in this transformative era.