IDEOLOGICAL TRANSMISSION III
POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

FULL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2018

Benjamin Lee and Kim Knott

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This is the third and final research review in the CREST series on ideological transmission (the first was on the family, and the second on peers, education and prisons). It focuses on the process by which religious and political groups – from small cells and organisations to large movements, networks and milieus – pass on ideas, beliefs and values. Academic research on how, where and why these are transmitted, and by whom, is considered.

Ideological transmission is interpreted as the passing on of ideology from one person to another, or from a group to its internal and external audiences. We treat ideology as a broad concept, encompassing both political and religious ideas, and including beliefs, values, and their related practices.

Two main persuasive orientations were considered in this review: (i) external awareness-raising by groups, and (ii) their internal attempts to influence members and supporters. Three analytical concepts provided the focus: propaganda, framing and learning.

1. How do ideological groups make potential supporters and other outsiders aware of their views (awareness-raising/persuasion/propaganda)?

2. How is ideological material (beliefs, events, issues etc) framed by groups as they seek to raise awareness, gain recruits and energise followers?

3. How do members and other supporters acquire ideological knowledge within groups (learning/indoctrination)?

These questions are interconnected by the concept of 'persuasion', more specifically the active attempts used by external agents to persuade individuals.

The review draws on a range of evidence from multiple disciplines and contexts. Extremist groups – violent and non-violent – provide the principal examples, including a case study on the jihadist group, al-Muhajiroun. However, it is clear that an understanding of how such groups communicate internally and externally needs to be set in the broader context of research on why organisations in general transmit ideas, beliefs and values (e.g. for group survival, recruitment, solidarity or coercion), how they go about doing so (formally or informally, top-down or peer-to-peer), what role ideological transmission plays in their goals, and how effective it is. In the case of extremist groups, the relationship between ideological transmission and radicalisation, recruitment, mobilisation and the move to violence are also important.

1 PROPAGANDA AND THE EXTERNAL TRANSMISSION OF IDEOLOGY

1.1 One recent definition describes propaganda as '*the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way*'.

1.2 There is a long history of the study of propaganda, mainly focused on the use of propaganda by states, often in times of war.

1.3 Although state propaganda is often presented as highly effective, theoretical and empirical research suggests that even in cases where media systems are tightly controlled the effectiveness of propaganda is limited.

1.4 The most effective propaganda trades on pre-existing biases within populations.

1.5 In studies of propaganda assumptions were often made that message receivers had little agency and were helpless in the face of the propaganda with which they are assailed (as in the 'hypodermic needle' model of propaganda).

1.6 The 'elaboration likelihood' model gave more weight to the agency of audiences. When message recipients are motivated to engage with information, and have the resources to do so, they are more likely to pay attention and think deeply. Where attitude change occurs under these conditions, it is thought to be more enduring and more predictive of future behaviour as information is internalised. When motivation or ability to engage with information are low, recipients will expend less effort on evaluating

appeals and are more likely to arrive at a response based on cues given to them.

1.7 From the 1990s, theorists shifted their attention from 'propaganda' to 'promotional culture', 'strategic communication' and 'discourse', though the rise of the Internet as a new platform for ideological transmission has recently led to an interest in 'computational propaganda'.

1.8 Computational propaganda, which combines social media, big data, and automation to manipulate public opinion, has become an emerging strategy in the use of information technology for social control.

1.9 Analysis of the Web also shows that users are able to create their own online environments in which opposing views are excluded. In such 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles', political positions are not only allowed to go unchallenged, but are likely to polarise as activists compete to demonstrate ideological purity.

1.10 Propaganda has been closely linked to terrorism, with several models of terrorism viewing violence as a form of political communication, as 'propaganda of the deed'.

1.11 Among other objectives, terrorist violence is designed to raise awareness of a group and its aims, as well as demonstrate that resistance is possible. Terrorist violence also aims to provoke a backlash by the state against sympathetic populations.

1.12 The impact of the Internet on propaganda and extremism has largely been considered through the frame of radicalisation, with little clear evidence that the presence of violent extremist narratives online has led to a growth in violent extremism.

1.13 The Internet has come to play a role in transmitting violent ideology in the same way that it does in transmitting other types of content. Social media, like other communications media, has been exploited.

1.14 Research has highlighted the role of the Web in providing violent extremist groups with access to larger and more dispersed audiences, as well as in accelerating the circulation of narratives, and providing low-risk forms of participation, e.g.

sharing propaganda.

1.15 The increasing focus on the role of the Internet in facilitating violent extremism has led Government and other authorities to restrict access to violent extremist material, by taking down websites, removing content or uploading counter-narratives. This has increased reliance on harder to access tools (e.g. on the dark web) which may reduce audiences for violent extremist material.

2   THE FRAMING OF IDEAS, BELIEFS AND VALUES

2.1 A further tool for studying communication by political and religious groups is framing theory, developed in the context of research on social movements.

2.2 Frames are understood as existing mental schemas that provide a worldview for their adherents.

2.3 In framing theory, audiences were granted a role in interpreting and reacting to social movement frames, with movements bending their frames to fit new circumstances and audiences.

2.4 Framing theory is based on the idea that a shared culture and/or ideological position which resonates with audiences is needed to support collective action. This may enable the mobilisation of new recruits into the group, but may also help sustain the commitment of existing members.

2.5 A frame is understood to consist of three tasks: a diagnosis, a prognosis, and a motivational frame.

2.6 Diagnostic tasks identify problems, often focusing on victim narratives and injustice frames. They may also attribute blame and name those responsible for injustices. Prognostic framing proposes a solution to the diagnosed problem, including criticising the solutions proposed by others. Motivational tasks aim to move people from belief to action. Motivational vocabularies focus on severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety.

2.7 The resonance of a frame with an audience – a combination of its credibility and salience

– relies on the consistency of the frame, the presence of readily accessible empirical evidence, and the credibility of those purveying the frame.

2.8 Theorists have suggested that, in competitive situations, frames that are repeated more often would be more credible, as would stronger frames, such as those that come from more credible sources, do not contradict prior knowledge, and that resonate with established values.

2.9 Framing theory has been used to bridge the divide between those studying violent mobilisations as consequences of rational and purposeful decision making by elites, and those taking a perspective that includes identity, emotions, history and symbols.

2.10 While propaganda has been widely acknowledged as limited and bound by culture and norms, framing theory has been able to take into consideration wider social and political contexts and their impact on mobilisation.

3   LEARNING AND THE INTERNAL TRANSMISSION OF IDEOLOGY

3.1 In addition to their attention to external communications, political and religious groups look inwards, to pass on ideas and traditions from one generation to the next, to stimulate belief, trust and acceptance of new policies and technological changes, to retain members, and build community and commitment.

3.2 In addition to *social learning theory*, in which emphasis was placed on the acquisition of skills through the observation of others, learning theory has developed to include *transformative learning*, a dimension of adult learning that enables us to reassess and transform our underlying frame of reference, *experiential learning*, where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, and *situated learning*, which stresses the importance of cultural context and communities of practice for learning as social participation.

3.3 The aspirational concept of a 'learning organisation' began to be used in the 1990s. A learning organisation is one that 'facilitates the learning of all its members, and continuously transforms itself'.

3.4 An important corrective came from scholars who stressed the 'dialectic of control' in organisations, and the interplay of power, institutional ideology and tacit coercion in the approaches used by managers/leaders in relation to employees/recruits.

3.5 Another important learning concept was the 'community of practice', based on the idea of apprenticeship as a means of gaining 'legitimate peripheral access' to a community and its knowledge and skills. Such communities exist everywhere, and each person belongs to multiple communities at any one time. In such contexts, learning is embedded in everyday social practices.

3.6 Those involved in groups are at different stages in an organisational learning process. They are being trained as new recruits or established members to fulfil certain roles; they are simultaneously being integrated into their organisation's collective memory and becoming its repository.

3.7 Some adult learners will be adding to the embodied and in some cases doctrinal knowledge they acquired in childhood; they may be becoming more steadfast in their practice, may be reverting after a time away, or converting to a new political or religious identity.

3.8 Other learners will be newcomers who need to build from scratch. They may have done some independent questing and learning before contacting or joining a group, but will want to be enculturated swiftly rather than remaining an outsider or novice for long. Learning the basics and the lingo will be important for a sense of belonging as well as doctrinal alignment.

3.9 There are several purposes to adult learning in political and religious groups: transmitting an ideology or worldview for the greater good of the group and wider society, now and in the future; keeping the traditions of the group going

from one generation to the next through a 'chain of memory'; training individuals to transmit these traditions, to perform the group's beliefs and rituals, and to be a workforce for everyday tasks; ensuring the organisation's adaptability and openness to innovation; and enabling the group to engage successfully in ideological and in some cases physical debates and contests.

3.10 In tightly-knit and/or hierarchical organisations, leaders are able to discipline members and control the discourses and practices related to learning, whereas in more fluid networks and less hierarchical movements greater onus is placed on individuals to sustain their own involvement and learning. Wider political and religious milieus will be looser still, with participants entirely in charge of their own learning, with guidance being *ad hoc* and resources dispersed.

3.11 The nature of the learning offered and a learner's capacity to integrate and use it depend on the length and stage of their involvement and on factors such as trust, range of roles and responsibilities, and social mobility within the organisation.

3.12 Research has shown that neither aspirational ideologies nor managerial strategies are entirely effective, with many learners in voluntary organisations failing to align their thinking and practice with the theology or institutional logic on offer. Some retain their earlier views, some become negative or alienated, and only a minority convert to a new ideological position or identity.

3.13 Learning – whether formal or informal – has been seen as geared to recruitment, conversion to a new worldview or institutional logic, individual spiritual progress, the development of wider instrumental skills, and/or mobilisation to action, including violence.

4 LEARNING IN VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

4.1 Terrorist learning has been defined as 'the acquisition of knowledge to inform terrorist related activities in the future'.

4.2 In one recent study of terrorist learning four stages were identified (described in terms of lessons learned): *identification*, including both the acquisition and interpretation of a lesson, *distribution*, the sharing of a lesson with other learners, *retention*, when a lesson is recorded for future use, and *implementation*, when the lesson has been learned and the agent is ready to put it to use.

4.3 Terrorist learning has generally been discussed in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness, without consideration of the way in which actors impose ideological meaning on terrorist activity or the impact of terrorism on wider audiences.

4.4 However, in one account, of 'becoming a committed insider', attention was given to the acquisition of values, meaning, emotions and relationships. The stages in this process were identified as contact with charismatic leaders; initiation and the adoption of identifying marks and symbols; redefinition of the past and adoption of new values, including 'demonization of the enemy'; sacrifice and hardship, including dissociation from previous relationships; loyal participation in the new way of life; the demonstration of commitment through actions; new status and role achieved.

4.5 Approaches by groups to ideological instruction have been diverse, with some being highly centralised and controlled in their transmission processes, and others exploiting a cell-like structure to share knowledge and maintain commitment. Diffuse or informal networks operate with more of a DIY ethos, although with some social and ideological controls in place. Studies of lone actors suggest that autonomous learning also takes place.

4.6 The UK network of militant Islamists, al-Muhajiroun, provides an instructive case study of how organised extremist groups seek to transmit ideology. Although now banned, the network was permitted to operate openly for an extended period. Researchers and journalists were able to gain access to the network at various points, resulting in an insightful literature on the group's activities and learning.

4.7 External ideological transmission was a core feature of al-Muhajiroun. This was evident in the group's incessant publicity-seeking, its eagerness to engage with journalists, and its use of public protests and street stalls. The purpose of these activities was to instil in the receptive a sense of grievance and crisis.

4.8 Al-Muhajiroun sought to work internally with its activists to develop their ideological knowledge. Alongside the formal teaching of new recruits by leaders, informal learning – through a 'community of practice' – was a key component of instruction. It involved learning by companionship, shadowing an established practitioner, participation in street protest, as well as participation in formalised study groups. These interactions helped build group solidarity as well as developing knowledge and skills.

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

This is the third and final research review in a series on ideological transmission (the first on the family, and second on peers, education and prisons) produced by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST). It focuses on ideological transmission in political and religious organisations, and examines external and internal communications, and the framing of ideological material.

These research reviews are informed by four research questions:

(a) *How* is political and religious ideology (beliefs, values, attitudes, and related practices) passed on between and across generations and to newcomers?

(b) *Who* is responsible for ideological transmission?

(c) *Where* and *when* does ideological transmission take place?

(d) How do these issues apply to the transmission of extremist and terrorist ideologies?

Our early analysis of the research literature suggested an approach to organising the reviews based on the life cycle and the general process of socialisation in and through (a) the family (Report 1), (b) peers, particularly in the contexts of education and prison (Report 2), and (c) political and religious organisations (Report 3). This life-cycle perspective builds on earlier developmental approaches to socialisation.

How the process of socialisation happens for individuals – who are always interconnected with others in families, communities, groups and networks – depends on a number of variables. These include cultural and geographical context, social position and status, nationality and citizenship, ethnicity, religion, political participation, gender, age, migration history, education, family structure, and media access, as well as physical, cognitive and affective influences.

INTRODUCTION

PERSUASION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF IDEOLOGY IN POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

This review analyses the available research on how ideology is communicated by political and religious organisations and networks. As in the earlier reviews in this series, our understanding of ideology is deliberately broad, and includes values, ideas and practices in both religious and political contexts.

Academic research of relevance to ideological transmission has been carried out in diverse disciplines, and a thorough review of the concept requires working across a variety of fields in which different terminology has been used, for different ends. Key disciplines drawn on in this review have been political science, the study of religions, management and organisational studies, sociology, and media and communication studies.

Two main communicative orientations have underpinned our review of the literature: (i) external awareness-raising by religious and political groups, and (ii) their internal attempts to influence members and supporters. Three analytical motifs have been identified as central for theorising how such groups transmit ideas, beliefs and values: propaganda, framing and learning. These are interconnected by the concept of 'persuasion', more specifically the active attempts used by external agents to persuade individuals.

An early and influential argument was made by Aristotle. He contended that persuasion relied on logos (the logic of the appeal), ethos (the mindset and trustworthiness of the speaker), and pathos (the emotional appeal of the argument). Since this early model there have been many attempts to isolate the factors that make messages and individuals more persuasive. Robert Cialdini (2001) has concentrated on the 'basic tendencies of human behaviour' likely to influence others. Writing from the perspective of marketing and sales, he (2001; Cialdini & Martin 2018) suggested a range of human tendencies which could be used to persuade individuals on an interpersonal level:

a) **Reciprocation** – exploiting norms around reciprocation by offering concessions or goods to a target, for example charities that provide free gifts in attempts to solicit donations

b) **Consistency** – holding targets to previously expressed public commitments, for example by following up on a petition with requests for money

c) **Social validation** – exploiting tendencies to look to others in deciding how to behave, for example the image of crowds rushing to stores used in advertising

d) **Liking** – exploiting tendencies to say 'yes' to people they already like, for example by employing good-looking sales staff

e) **Authority** – using symbols of authority to achieve compliance, for example wearing a uniform, listing academic qualifications

f) **Scarcity** – Implying that something is less available in order to increase its appeal.

Although Cialdini identified these persuasive techniques from research on marketing, some of these same tendencies are clearly relevant when it comes to the persuasion of individuals in ideological groups, as will become evident later in the review.

Outside the business world, the discipline of media studies has been preoccupied with persuasion and the effects of media consumption on attitudes. Providing an overview of communication theory in 2010, the influential theorist Denis McQuail (2010: 516) summarised the main factors affecting media persuasiveness, noting some similar tendencies to those listed by Cialdini:

- The perceived authority, legitimacy and credibility of the source
- Consistency of content of media messages
- Attachment and loyalty to sources
- Motives and attention to media
- Congruence of content with existing opinion or belief
- Amount and quality of attention paid
- Skill and appeal of message presentation
- Support from personal contacts and the environment.

McQuail identified these factors on the basis of his and others' observations of how media consumers respond to the messages presented to them by media producers. The role of message receivers in persuasion has been an important focus for other scholars too, specifically the extent to which they are able to actively reject persuasive attempts. For example, in conceptualisations of propaganda, the assumption has often been made that message receivers have little agency and are helpless in the face of the propaganda with which they are assailed (often described as the 'hypodermic needle' model).

One of the most enduring models of persuasion has been the 'elaboration likelihood' model. In it, Cacioppo and Petty (1984) sought to reinforce the agency of audiences.

> *[We] view recipients as being neither invariantly cogitative nor universally mindless when dealing with persuasive appeals. Instead various factors, and combinations of factors, are viewed as determining people's motivations and ability to think carefully about the merits of the arguments for a recommendation. (Cacioppo & Petty 1984: 1).*

The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion identified multiple types of information processing and how each relates to persuasion. When message recipients are motivated to engage with information, and have the resources to do so, elaboration is described as high. Recipients are more likely to pay attention and think deeply about the information they are presented with. Where attitude change occurs under these conditions, it is thought to be more enduring and more predictive of future behaviour as information is internalised. Where motivation or ability to engage with information are low, then recipients will expend less effort on evaluating appeals and are more likely to attempt to arrive at a 'reasonable' response based on cues given to them (Cacioppo & Petty 1984: 1). Although elaboration is a continuous scale, not a binary, the model commonly gives rise to two 'routes' to persuasion, the central route (high elaboration) and the peripheral (low elaboration) (O'Keefe 2012: 138-139). Under conditions of high elaboration, the quality of argument is thought more relevant, as is the extent to which it matches with the recipient's existing attitudes

(Cacioppo & Petty 1984: 2, O'Keefe 2012). In the peripheral route, the lack of deep-rooted thinking means receivers are more likely to rely on heuristics: general and simple rules that require little thought. O'Keefe (2012) notes that the elaboration likelihood model opens the way to consider how appeals may produce different effects in different audiences depending on the level of elaboration.

The literature on persuasion is extensive, and this short discussion cannot do it justice. The aim has been to show how scholars of persuasion from several different fields have offered insights of relevance for examining the forms and methods of persuasion that occur in political and religious groups. These include the general and broad-based types of *propaganda* that groups direct at target audiences, more nuanced attempts to *frame or align movement/organisation narratives* with the general public, and some of the interpersonal communications characteristic of religious and political *learning and indoctrination*. Although the research literatures on propaganda, framing and learning may appear to be unconnected, and are very often treated as such by scholars from different disciplines, models of persuasion and the factors and conditions that enable it to occur are pertinent to all three.

In this review, the role of groups in the transmission of ideology is considered in relation to three general questions:

1. How do ideological groups make potential supporters and other outsiders aware of their views (awareness-raising/persuasion/propaganda)?

2. How is ideological material (beliefs, events, issues etc) framed by groups as they seek to raise awareness, gain recruits and energise followers?

3. How do members and other supporters acquire ideological knowledge within groups (learning/indoctrination)?

These perspectives are intended to act as a loose organisational framework for the review, and allow consideration of both the external and internal aspects of ideological transmission in and by groups. They should be seen as relatively fluid categories. For example, externally-focused propaganda may also be used as material for in-group learning. Likewise,

issues around framing apply both to those outside and within a group. The position of individuals also changes. An individual may start outside a group and then increase support without ever becoming formally involved. Committed supporters may fall away from groups but still involve themselves in ideological debate. In some cases, individuals may engage with maximum effort, or in others, disengage altogether.

Although attention is given to political or religious extremism and violence, especially in a final case study on al-Muhajiroun, the review sets this in the context of broader processes of internal and external transmission. What Berger and Luckmann (1966: 130) referred to as 'secondary socialisation' takes place routinely within political and religious organisations as they seek to instil know-how and skills, as well as ideas, beliefs and values (know-what). Simultaneously, such groups address how best to get their ideas out to a wider audience of potential supporters. As a result, evidence for the review comes from a broad range of studies of in-group learning and external ideological dissemination. Some of these have involved historical cases, for example, in relation to the use of propaganda in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany; others have focused on contemporary examples, such as organisational learning in new religious movements, and online propaganda by ISIS and far right extremists.

The review is structured in four parts. Part One examines the role of propaganda in the transmission of ideology by political and religious groups. Part Two focuses on framing, and considers how groups frame ideological material for different audiences and purposes. Part Three considers learning within political and religious organisations, which may also be thought of in terms of enculturation and/or indoctrination. It provides a general overview of relevant theory before turning to learning in relation to violent extremism. A case study on ideological transmission in the UK-based extremist jihadi organisation, al-Muhajiroun, is provided in Part Four.

1. PROPAGANDA AND THE EXTERNAL TRANSMISSION OF IDEOLOGY

The focus of the first part of this review is on how political and religious organisations communicate their messages to potential supporters and recruits outside the group. Further, it describes how they spread news and information more widely about their priorities, beliefs and values, often by blaming or disparaging others.

Arguably the best starting point for understanding how such groups advertise their existence is propaganda. There is no single academic discipline which deals exclusively with propaganda (Silverstein 1987: 50); furthermore, accepted definitions are rare. Bernays (1928: 52) defined propaganda as 'a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group'. Some eighty years later, McQuail (2010: 533) described it as a form of mass communication in the same vein as news production, albeit with 'special characteristics'. Propaganda lacks objectivity, can be coercive and has no regard for truth, even if truth can be good propaganda, he stated (McQuail 2010:531; Payne 2009: 110). Most tellingly, propaganda 'is always carried out to further some interest of the propagandist, not the target audience' (McQuail: 2010, 531).

This final criterion, for McQuail, distinguished propaganda from more general news output. Taylor attached a similar criterion to his definition, seeing propaganda as,

> the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way. Although I recognize that much propaganda is accidental or unconscious, here I am discussing the conscious, methodical and planned decisions to employ techniques of persuasion designed to achieve specific goals

that are intended to benefit those organizing the process. (Taylor 2012: 6).

The link between political propaganda and media representation was reinforced by Silverstein in the 1980s. He (1987: 51) defined propaganda as 'communications delivered with the conscious intent of manipulation' but went on to note that much propaganda is produced subconsciously by subtle processes, for example through the editing of newspaper articles.

Definitions of 'propaganda' leave space for a broad academic consideration of the nature of ideological persuasion and its techniques – in so far as it has been seen as 'the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way' (Taylor 2012: 6). Despite the 16th century Roman Catholic origins of the term with reference to the 'Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith' (Fledelius 2003: 342), more often than not it has been used to describe and analyse secular state-based campaigns rather than the rhetoric and practices of political and religious actors more generally.

1.1 PROPAGANDA, STATES AND BEYOND

1.1.1 PROPAGANDA: DEFINITIONS AND CONNOTATIONS

After the First World War, the analysis of propaganda reflected an overriding concern with the apparently omnipotent aspects of propaganda that were able to mobilise entire states to hate one another (Lasswell 1938:3). This need for mass mobilisation and a united population, particularly in atomised industrial democracies, according to Lasswell (1938: 222), gave rise to the modern incarnation of propaganda.

> There must be no ambiguity about whom the public is to hate. The war must not be due to a world system of conducting international affairs, nor to the stupidity and malevolence of all governing classes, but to the rapacity of the enemy. Guilt and guilelessness must be assessed geographically, and all the guilt must be on the other side of the frontier. (Lasswell 1938: 47)

Historically, propaganda was often painted as having near supernatural potential for controlling public opinion. H.G. Wells argued that:

> *Modern means of communication – the power afforded by print, telephone, wireless and so forth, of rapidly putting through directive strategic or technical conceptions to a great number of cooperating centres, of getting quick replies and effective discussion – have opened up a new world of political processes. (Wells, quoted in Bernays 1928: 40).*

Further, Bernays suggested that the power of propaganda gave rise to an 'invisible government', a hidden class of rules able to bend societies to their will (Bernays 1928: 37).

Propaganda has also attracted a strongly negative connotation, coming to be synonymous with untruth. Seidman (2008: 7) attributed such negative connotations of propaganda to the aftermath of the First World War, suggesting that many populations 'felt duped' by the information presented to them by their own governments. However, there have been attempts to rehabilitate the term. Bernays (1928: 28), for example, saw propaganda in democratic states as a shortcut for citizens, allowing them to make decisions based on selected information, rather than requiring exhausting efforts to research all the possible choices (see also Cacioppo & Petty 1984; O'Keefe 2012). Despite understandings of propaganda more readily associated with totalitarian regimes, Bernays (1928: 53) argued that propaganda had become essential to any large-scale undertaking in democratic societies.

Where public support is required, then efforts will be made to sway public opinion. In Lee's analysis, propaganda is everywhere, and is an unavoidable component of communication. The 'shorthand of the propagandist' is a necessary tool for a public that is unable or unwilling to listen to more rational and longer arguments (Lee 1945: 126). It could be thought of as a convenient means of expression to convey ideas rapidly to many people.

> *Through graphic symbols, music, pageantry, and combinations of words the propagandist makes impressions upon masses of people. These impressions are sometimes vivid. They are frequently charged with emotion. They*

may be wholly or partially 'true,' confusing, or 'false'. (Lee 1945: 126)

Corner (2007) made the case that the role of promotional culture in every day politics has rendered the term propaganda meaningless. After considering a wider array of perspectives, he argued that researchers needed to move beyond the bounds of propaganda as a concept to consider in more depth the ethics of promotional communication (Corner 2007: 676). In particular, he (2007) noted the central role of 'untruth', as well as the motivation and consequence of communications.

An alternative argument claimed that propaganda remained a vital pursuit, especially amongst governments. As civilians became the primary victims of warfare, greater efforts than ever were required to keep the population on side (Knightly 2012: 377). In similar vein, other scholars argued that Western governments had replaced 'propaganda' with a series of euphemisms, such as 'strategic communication', in order to escape the negativity associated with the term (Taylor 2012: 362).

In research on religion, the term has been used to refer to manipulative acts or influence by those in positions of *religious* authority, except in those historical cases where such positions were state- or opposition-sponsored (e.g. in the case of the Vatican [Fledelius 2003], the Spanish civil war [Diaz-Balart 2017]), or were combined with political roles (as in the English civil war [Burgess 1998] and the French wars of religion [Racaut 2002]). Other terms, and their attendant processes, have been favoured, such as 'indoctrination', the process of teaching others to accept beliefs and ideas uncritically, 'proselytization', the conversion of others to another religion or point of view, 'inculcation', instilling of knowledge and values, and, of course, 'conversion' itself.

In recent decades, research on religion has tended to focus more on 'discourse' than ideological transmission. However, the discursive turn has not meant abandoning the focus on power. Drawing on Foucault in particular, scholars of religion writing about religious discourse or discourse about religion have foregrounded the power relations intrinsic to the constitution, construction *and communication* of knowledge (e.g. Hjelm 2014; McCutcheon 1997; Taira 2013). Media discourses of religion and their

representations have received scholarly attention, with research focusing on media bias and blindspots, especially in respect of Islam and Muslims (Knott et al 2013; Kundnani 2014; Moore et al 2008; Poole 2002; Poole & Richardson 2006). Although researchers have discussed the power of media producers and the production process in the selection and communication of messages about religion, they have not made use of the concept of propaganda.

Ethnographic studies of discourse and discourses on religion have had the virtue of reflecting, much like Kendzior (2006) below, on discursive power relations between authoritative public sources (Government, media etc) and grassroots responses and counter narratives. Baumann (1996), for example, in his work on religious and ethnic groups in Southall, London, discussed both dominant and demotic discourses at work in the collective formation of notions of 'community' and 'culture'. He showed how the communication of dominant conceptions was disrupted from below by local actors. Stringer (2013) too, in his research on religious diversity in several Birmingham neighbourhoods, focused on informal discourse, juxtaposing it to the formal interreligious dialogue of theologians and organised interfaith groups. Such work not only shows a preference for studies of discourse about religion over those on (religious) propaganda and persuasion, but a move from top-down, state-led approaches to those that foreground informal, contextually-driven discourses which trouble the authorized versions.

For a variety of reasons, the terminological landscape has shifted, from a focus on 'propaganda' to other concepts – such as 'promotional culture', 'strategic communication' and 'discourse' – on the basis of new research directions and theoretical interventions. 'Propaganda' has not left the stage entirely, however.

1.1.2   PROPAGANDA: CONTEXTS, LIMITATIONS, EFFECTS

The idea that propaganda represents the opportunity to create a blank slate for the powerful to proceed as they wish has been seriously questioned by political theorists. Lasswell (1938: 186), for example, described several traps awaiting propagandists which might lead to 'cross-current[s]', for example German propaganda directed against Catholic Belgians stirring a contrary response from Catholic Germans. Lasswell argued

that there were very few areas in which propagandists had complete freedom of action. He also pointed to specific groups in societies who could make propaganda difficult, for example the large numbers of foreign-born citizens in the US able to contradict propagandist accounts of life in a US democracy (Lasswell 1938: 187-8). He identified a more nebulous 'tension level', which he viewed as akin to nervous energy, which could affect a population's responses to propaganda. Tension levels, he argued, differed in different states, with industrialised nations supposedly acting at a higher tension level (Lasswell 1938: 190).

> *Success depends on traditional prejudices, objective connections between nations, and the popular irritability. No matter how skilful the propagandist may be in organising his staff, selecting suggestions, and exploiting instruments of transmission, his manipulative skill will go for nought if there is no favourable juxtaposition of social forces to aid him. (Lasswell 1938: 192)*

Although Lasswell focused on state-level propaganda, his understanding of the linkage, between the intentions and skills of propagandists and their social location in all its emotional complexity, has remained of critical importance for understanding the external communications of political and religious factions more generally (as in the case of propaganda use in Rwanda below).

The study of Soviet political and atheist anti-religious discourses likewise generated discussion of the impact and contention of state-level propaganda in a variety of contexts: for example, in D'Herbigny's (1993) articles in *The Irish Monthly*, on Soviet propaganda against religion in Ireland, India, Peru, Canada and Belgium; Shaw's (2002) analysis of religion and Cold War cinematic propaganda in the 1950s; and Kendzior's (2006) research on the efforts by Soviet-era Uzbek atheists to control Islam and 'Muslimness' during the era of *Glasnost*. In the last of these, Kendzior (2006) argued that the durability of local Muslim religion and culture proved resilient in the face of dominant Soviet anti-religious propaganda, much to the surprise of political authorities:

> *By the late 1980s, the Soviets had succeeded in curtailing religion in Uzbekistan by removing its outward manifestations:*

closing mosques and madrasas; banning sacred texts and languages; outlawing non-state-sanctioned religious leaders and congregations. […] In artificially created Uzbekistan, Islam—or, more precisely, "Muslimness"—served as a passport to a purely Central Asian culture and history, a definitive means of differentiating the Uzbek populace from the ruling Russian elite. The surprising durability of the notion of ummah in the face of sovetskii narod proved perplexing to Soviet leaders. (Kendzior 2006: 533)

In this context, there was a tension between Soviet but also local Uzbek atheist proclamations that religion had been eradicated, and the power of the 'illusion of Islam, its psychic hold, its irrational assurance' and its practical embeddedness in local life and culture (Kendzior 2006: 546). Uzbek atheists themselves said one thing but did another, continuing to perform 'Muslimness' whilst speaking and writing against religion. What Kendzior's analysis adds to the debate about propaganda, its effectiveness, limitations and relationship to media and state communications, is not only that context mattered, but that populations could be resilient and could bring their own deep-seated ideological conceptions and political tactics to the table.

In other work on Soviet atheist discourse, Klimova and Molostova (2013) discussed the reach of political propaganda, in this case into the academy itself. They examined,

the methodological challenges of Soviet sociology of religion in the period between 1960 and 1989, when [the discipline] was charged with the contradictory task of investigating the actual standing of religion in Soviet society and, at the same time, with proposing methods through which the official 'scientific atheism', deeply rooted in Marxism, could be imposed upon the very populations that were the subject of its inquiries. (Klimova & Molostova 2013: 169)

There had been a determination on the part of the political authorities that propaganda – seeking to convert the population to atheism – should succeed in challenging the reality of the survival of religion in

the beliefs and emotions of the people. Here was an example of 'the ideologization of science, based on the presupposition that the religious relics of the past could, in principle, be eliminated' by official political propaganda (Klimova and Molostova 2013: 189).

In another analysis of Soviet anti-religious propaganda, Powell (1967) usefully highlighted some of the complexities of measuring the impact of propaganda in wider populations. Although where available, measures of public opinion might point to the effectiveness of propaganda campaigns, serious drawbacks nevertheless remained. Confounding variables and the necessity of relying on field data with no possibility of a control group limited the validity of data, as did questions of how dependent variables were to be measured. In the case of anti-religious propaganda, for example, how could belief be quantified (Powell 1967: 369)? Powell highlighted the difficulty of Soviet propagandists in reaching relevant audiences. The religious did not engage with atheist propaganda, dismissing material out of hand. He also noted the poor quality of the content, suggesting that anti-religious propaganda was not relevant to its audience and failed to engage audiences on an emotional level or to appreciate the mechanics of belief. In order to explain the Soviet situation, Powell (1967) also drew on American propaganda research from the time.

In general, when a message is inconsistent with an individual's cognitive structure it will be ignored, rejected or distorted so as to inhibit conflict or anxiety. This statement, valid for most situations, is particularly true for communications on subjects that are important to an individual. (Powell 1967: 377)

Propaganda, at this level, was deemed to be more effective as a tool for continuity than change, working best if it would inoculate audiences early on. This resonates with similar arguments from other researchers (Ellul 1973; Silverstein 1987). Powell saw opinion change as more effective in cases where individuals approached opinion leaders (as distinct from being influenced by paid agitators) (Powell 1967: 380).

What we see in this body of research on Soviet atheist propaganda is the – successful or unsuccessful – use

of state-level propaganda against religion. The concept of 'propaganda' was deployed here to refer to the ideological rhetoric and communicative practices of those in positions of political power and authority against wider publics. The very idea of propaganda appears to have been that it is an instrument of power (albeit one that could be countered or ignored); it is political. Religious discourse, in the cases above, was not referred to as propagandist; religion/religious people were generally portrayed as acted upon rather than as actors in their own right (but see Kendzior 2006). Arguably, this is because more often than not propaganda has been associated with the top-down actions of states (predominantly secular) to manipulate or influence populations, rather than with the strategies of religious or political organisations or movements.

In contrast to centralised state-backed propaganda campaigns, political opinion leaders were often supported by efforts to influence populations at the local level. The Nazi party, for example, relied on an extensive network of grassroots supporters. These not only disseminated propaganda, but in doing so strengthened their own commitment and made opponents less willing to speak out. The inclusion of friends and neighbours into the Nazi propaganda structure also had the effect of emphasising the risks associated with speaking out (Bytwerk 2010). Likewise, Inkeles (1954), in describing the 'Bolshevik Agitator', noted the strong belief within the Soviet Union in the need for interpersonal communication, and the need to recruit agitators from different contexts.

Analysis of the effects of propaganda has been diverse and seldom straightforward (DellaVigna & Gentzkow 2010). Data has been difficult to obtain and, where large-scale field experiments have been possible, the outcomes have often been surprising. A study on voting behaviour in the US by Gerber et al (2009), for example, revealed that free subscriptions to left- and right-leaning newspapers had no effect on political knowledge, opinion, or turnout at elections. However, receiving either paper did result in an increase in support for a Democratic candidate.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide is often used as an example of the impact of propaganda, specifically on mass violence. The genocide was state-sponsored, taking place following a government takeover by

extremist Hutu factions (Yanagizawa-Drott 2014). Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) became totemic of the assumed media role in the spread of violence (Straus 2007). While RTLM was seized on as a driver of the violence, Straus (2007:611) argued that the role of radio needed to be viewed in context:

> *On the whole, I conclude that radio alone cannot account for either the onset of most genocidal violence or the participation of most perpetrators. That said, I find some evidence of conditional media effects. Radio catalyzed a small number of individuals and incidents of violence, framed public choice, and reinforced messages that many individuals received during face-to-face mobilization. (Straus 2007: 611)*

Straus (2007: 614-616) noted that claims that radio was integral in both the ideological and operational aspects of the genocide contradicted established communications theory, portraying a 'hypodermic needle' model of communication which allowed little room for individual decision-making by perpetrators, and took little consideration of the reception and dissemination of propaganda (see Cacioppo & Petty 1984; O'Keefe 2012). RTLM, in Straus's (2007: 631) analysis, instigated a small number of specific instances of violence, 'emboldened hardliners', and generally underpinned the mass mobilisation of the population towards genocide.

Yanagizawa-Drott (2014) also analysed the influence of RTLM during the Rwandan genocide. Based on differential radio coverage in Rwanda, Yanagizawa-Drott's findings (2014: 1950) suggested that the use of RTLM to broadcast calls to genocidal action increased participation both in organised and individual violence by around 10%. He also noted the role of social contagion in the spread of violence, although this was limited to violence perpetrated by organised militias. The role of RTLM was particularly significant given low levels of literacy and television ownership in rural areas (Yanagizawa-Drott 2014). However, RTLM should not be considered in isolation from the wider political context and the actions of political elites, he suggested. Radio was not the only driver of the genocide.

1.2 PROPAGANDA, TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM

Despite the historical connections between propaganda and state conflict, propaganda has also been seen as a feature of sub-state conflict, especially terrorism. Although the origins of terrorism are often seen as ancient (Bloom 2005; Cook 2014), modern iterations of terrorism are often presented as beginning with the spate of anarchist/socialist attacks in the late nineteenth century. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II by bomb in March 1881 by Narodnaya Volya (The People's Will), although not an anarchist group, nevertheless 'electrified' anarchists, demonstrating that revolutionary change might actually be possible (Jensen 2004: 125). Likewise, the May 1882 killing by the Invincibles, a Fenian offshoot, of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Frank Cavendish, and his Chief Under Secretary, Thomas Burke, in Phoenix Park Dublin, was taken as inspiration by an anarchist publisher, Johann Most, who admired the 'shocking unpredictability' of the splinter group (O Donghaile 2010: 293).

The concept of *terrorism as propaganda*, often referred to as 'propaganda of the deed', dates back to the 19th century and the terrorist groups emerging from the anarchist movement. Some caution is warranted here as 'anarchist' became a useful catch-all term in the press and among politicians for a variety of actors (Jensen 2004: 125; Bolt 2008). Likewise, there were close connections and blurred distinctions between anarchist and socialist groups active at the time. Terrorist violence was used by some anarchists, but by no means the majority, and the threat was probably greatly overplayed and conflated local factors with an imagined mass anarchist conspiracy (Jensen 2004: 117, 127).

> *Malatesta and Kropotkin had called for propaganda by the deed, meaning actions aimed at insurrection and revolution, but soon got random acts of murder about which they harbored deep misgivings. Loath to abandon the lowly instigators of these deeds, the anarchist leaders apologized for them, and thus enabled, or at least assisted, the popular press and numerous politicians in finding someone to blame, or to scapegoat, for miscellaneous anti-social acts. (Jensen 2004: 128)*

The emergence of modern terrorist practice, however, is also closely linked to the emergence of mass media and literacy. Despite the idea that deeds themselves carry meaning, the concept of 'propaganda of the deed' is heavily reliant on the publicisation of such deeds through the media. As Sir Howard Vincent noted in 1906,

> *the rapidly increasing means of location, the spread of information, and the incendiary influence of publicity and notoriety [make police cooperation] more and more essential […] The 'advertisement' of anarchism, as of many other crimes, infallibly leads to imitation. (Quoted in Jensen 2004: 142)*

Schmid and De Graaf (1982: 14), in their work on violence as communication, conceptualised terrorism as a combination of violence and propaganda, an attempt at behaviour modification that combines communicative persuasion with violent coercion. They argued that in terrorism is present a sender (the terrorist), a message generator in the form of a victim, and a receiver in the form of an enemy and a public. Inherent in this understanding of terrorism as a communicative act is the role of the mass media.

The earliest forms of terrorism achieved limited dissemination and relied exclusively on word of mouth to make an impact, and consequently focused on high-profile targets rich with symbolism. The evolution of the news media, beginning with the emergence of popular presses and mass literacy in the 19th century opened up new possibilities for terrorists, dramatically magnifying the impact of their actions and the speed of their communication (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 11). Anarchist terrorism supplied the popular press with lurid stories that made for good copy and correspondingly healthy sales (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 12). This phenomenon has continued to be repeated in contemporary media responses to terrorism. Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010: 903) have described a media with an 'intrinsic gravitation towards that which is extreme and dangerous'. Likewise, others have raised the issue of a 'symbiotic' relationship between the media and terrorism (Nacos 2007: 64).

Schmid and De Graaf (1982) made the case that, historically, terrorist actions were driven by a lack of access to media. Terrorist acts were required to

generate publicity for causes that were not covered by a media in thrall to established interests. In the case of Northern Ireland, for example, the terrorism of the Troubles was linked to a failure by the news media to cover the aims of Republicanism in the 1960s, the frustration of achieving goals through democratic ends then resulting in terrorism, they suggested (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 181).

> *Where individuals or ethnic and revolutionary minorities cannot get their grievances redressed via the channels of politics and where they cannot get their views across effectively via the channels of mass communication, the chance that some of them will resort to terrorism is high. (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 181-2)*

The ability to explain actions in the media in relative anonymity has meant that the choice of target has become less important, and the victim no longer needs to convey the message beyond establishing media interest (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 16). As a result, the number of potential targets has widened. Nacos (2007: 15) makes a similar argument, describing mass mediated terrorism in which terrorist acts are calculated to garner media attention.

As a propaganda instrument, terrorism is directed at two audiences: opposition authorities and publics, and a constituency of potential supporters. Of these, there has been a focus on the message being relayed to the antagonist, and on what the choice of target says (O'Shaughnessy & Baines 2009: 229; Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 176). Schmid and De Graaf (1982: 12), for example, have described terrorism as follows: 'The goal was to reach public opinion, to send a message that made all the powerful tremble and gave the powerless hope.' However, from the perspective of ideological transmission, potential supporters are of greater importance to the terrorist group (Sedgwick 2004: 803). The news media is an avenue through which potential supporters can be reached, converted and mobilised (Schmid & De Graaf 1982: 53).

De Mesquita and Dickson (2007: 365) presented a model of terrorism and counter terrorism that attempted to explain the role of terrorist violence in generating further mobilisation within an 'aggrieved public'. They identified two mechanisms. The first was that, following terrorist violence, the resulting

government crackdown would provoke further involvement as measures encompassed the wider aggrieved population as well as terrorist actors. Secondly, the overall economic pressure resulting from terrorist violence would reduce the costs of involvement in violence overall, i.e. there would be fewer competing economic opportunities in a damaged economy (De Mesquita & Dickson 365). They also noted that violence by one group could also increase their support at the expense of more moderate factions.

This was also borne out in the work of Bolt (2008) on propaganda of the deed and Irish republicanism in which he stressed the extensive spatial and temporal impact of the political violence of 1916: 'It reinforced the myth across the Irish diaspora […] It further legitimised the freedom struggle in the eyes of international insurgents from the PLO to Germany's Baader-Meinhof Group, and funding states like Libya.' (Bolt 2008: 53) The 'martyrs' deed', as he referred to it, resonated globally and motivated supporters among a wider Irish public, especially in the US, but also emboldened and provided inspiration for potential terrorist groups in other political contexts. It established the principal that violent deeds can effectively deliver messages of intent and capability, even of grievance and injustice, although, as Bolt noted (2008: 53), over time those messages had 'to resonate with new populations and media'.

While news media were at one time a key site for judging (and in some cases controlling) the communicative impact of a terrorist act, they now face competition and augmentation from both terrorist organisations and smartphone-armed citizens publishing their own accounts of terrorist actions, often in a raw form. The rise of al-Qaeda can be seen as coinciding with the emergence of global media including satellite TV such as Al Jazeera in 1996 and the beginnings of widespread internet penetration (O'Shaughnessy & Baines 2009: 240; Payne 2009: 114).

1.3 PROPAGANDA ONLINE

The arrival of the Internet, World Wide Web and digital communications was initially hailed as likely to be progressive and emancipatory.[1] Early work described the end of the broadcast paradigm (Rheingold 2000), and discussed the retreat of states and corporations (Barlow 1996). Initial assessments touched on violent movements that were able to use the Web to popularise their causes and spread gospels of resistance (Castells et al 1995: 22). Some have remained of the opinion that online communication can lead to profound societal change. For example, Castells argued that online spaces remain difficult for governments to regulate; they provide social movements with the tools for autonomous communication and the ability to influence the creation of meaning by individuals (Castells 2012). Nevertheless, the failures of the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring to produce lasting societal change, despite their communicative impact, arguably highlight the limitations of propaganda, certainly in the immediate term.

One trend that has long been associated with the Web is the way it allows users to create their own online environments in which opposing views are excluded. Sunstein (2007) described the concept of 'echo chambers' in which political positions are not only allowed to go unchallenged, but also are likely to polarise as activists compete to demonstrate ideological purity. Similar ideas underpin the concept of 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011). O'Callaghan et al (2015) noted that both these concepts are highly user-centric, and they added to them the role of online recommendation systems, using the example of YouTube's propensity to suggest ideologically similar material (described as a 'rabbit hole'). Other analyses of extreme-right web presences however have described how groups of activists work to curate often diverse content, framing non-ideological material to support their positions (Lee 2015).

Scholars have begun to consider the role of the Web in enabling or limiting both terrorism and extremist ideologies specifically. According to recent work by Conway (2016), terrorism scholars still have some way to go in addressing the impact of the Web on their field. Conway has noted, among many limitations, that the focus has been on Islamist extremism at the expense of other sources of risk, and that Internet studies' literatures have not been integrated within terrorism studies (Conway 2016). The Web has been used specifically by terrorist groups as an easy to use, cheap, and largely anonymous tool to augment and organise their activities (Conway 2006; Freibruger & Crane 2008; Weimann 2004).

Holbrook's case study of the role of the Internet in a UK-based plot identified three roles – to provide actionable material such as bomb-making instructions, to provide ideological content (in this case largely stored offline), and as a tool to fill in any gaps in knowledge (Holbrook 2015: 132). Holbrook noted the overlap between ideological and actionable material in some cases, citing texts such as the *Mujahideen Explosives Handbook* as an example of practical advice with an ideological frame (Holbrook 2015: 130). Similar division between operational and facilitative roles for the Web have been noted in other analyses (e.g. Gill et al 2015).

There have also been definitional issues, with 'radicalisation' as a concept often inflated to the point that it consumes a group's external communication (propaganda), recruitment, and more internally-focused ideological development (learning). Much of the research on terrorism and the Internet focuses on radicalisation rather than the narrower concept of ideological transmission, and in particular the spectre of 'self-radicalisation' (Baaken & Schlegel 2017; Conway 2012; Neumann 2013). Empirically, however, there is little academic consensus on the role of the Web in radicalisation (O'Callaghan et al 2015). What little data there is on terrorist offenders suggests that there is no dichotomy between those radicalised online or offline, and in the vast majority of cases this is a simultaneous process (Gill et al 2015: 35). While the Internet is a component in violent radicalisation, there is little evidence that this differs from the role it has come to play in political and social life more generally. Likewise, it is not clear that the presence of online extremist material has led to any more or less terrorist activity.

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1   The terms Internet, World Wide Web, online and offline tend to be used interchangeably in the literature. The Internet refers to the technologies that connect computers globally, while the Web refers to the most widespread implementation of that technology. The Web runs via the Internet, as do other technologies, for example, email. In practice these terms are often used interchangeably by researchers. Researchers also refer to online and offline behaviours without specifying the exact technologies used.

Nevertheless, some themes of importance for ideological transmission – the appeal to multiple audiences, access and citizen participation – have begun to emerge from the literature on the use of the Internet by terrorist and extremist groups. For the most part, the use of the Web has been seen as a continuation of the existing media logic of terrorism. Neumann (2013), for instance, has argued that violent extremism is no different to the other areas of social life penetrated by the Internet, but also noted the vigour with which extreme voices have embraced the online sphere. Weimann (2004: 1), writing about terrorist websites, suggested that they have multifaceted audiences that include both the committed and potential supporters, as well as audiences external to the cause such as enemy populations and the wider international community. This division closely mirrors earlier work on terrorism and communication (see above). Excesses such as Abu Ghraib have been seized upon by propagandists from Islamist extremist groups, including al-Qaeda, and have contributed to a wider sense that the United States is losing the information war evidenced by public opinion in the Muslim world (Taylor 2012: 263). For external audiences, the impact of the Web has been most keenly felt in terms of access. Groups that previously would have relied on mainstream media can now frame their own narratives. While the effects are difficult to identify, as a result of the Web, extreme ideological material is certainly far more available than previously (O'Callaghan et al 2015).

While much of this online propaganda seems to extend the already established media logic of terrorism, other analyses have pointed to new dimensions of propaganda online, including issues of immediacy, experimentation, the impact on a wider milieu, the ability to bring together geographically dispersed sympathisers, the opportunities arising from automation, the pros and cons of anonymity, and control of the means of dissemination (technical platforms).

In terms of immediacy, Berger (2015), writing specifically about ISIS as a millenarian sect, has argued that social media operates in 'apocalyptic time'. The pace, volume, 'always on' nature, and remote intimacy that can insulate the curious from the risks of engagement, all contribute to giving ISIS's narratives a sense of immediacy (Berger 2015: 62).

Seeing the web as a sandbox in which those on the fringes of extreme ideological groups can experiment is implicit in discussions of digital radical milieus (Conway 2012). The term 'radical milieu' has been used to describe peripheral involvement in terrorist groups, encompassing activities that provide structural support for terrorist groups within populations – 'the radical segment of [a] society' (Waldman 2008: 2; see also Malthaner & Waldmann 2014). Koehler (2014: 121), for example, suggested a number of ways in which the Internet was leading to change in extreme-right radicalisation, including its capacity to provide feedback to propagandists on their efforts. This included new recruits being able to follow up propaganda material with creators, adding a more reactive and social dimension to extremist propaganda that facilitated closer involvement with wider movements (Koehler 2014: 121).

Similarly, accounts of al-Qaeda propaganda have linked the use of the Web to the 'long tail' effect (Amble 2012: 348; see also Anderson 2006). The connections the web offers between small, geographically decentralised populations allows for comparative minorities to be mobilised into effective organisations (or markets). One example of this comes from descriptions given by former extreme-right activists of a sense of 'critical mass' brought about by the Internet, which in turn emboldened activists to behave more radically (Koehler 2014: 121). Koehler's (2014: 118-119) analysis of the accounts of former activists highlighted not only the availability of extremist material online, but also the sense of freedom felt by some activists online as they were able to engage in perceived anonymity.

Online propaganda is also closely tied to the wider development of automation linked to technology. Computational propaganda is emerging as an area of interest for both computer scientists and political communication scholars alike. Woolley & Howard (2016: 4885), for instance, have argued that automated computer programmes imbued with politics 'have invaded political conversations worldwide'. They explained computational propaganda as:

> *the assemblage of social media platforms, autonomous agents, and big data tasked with the manipulation of public opinion. Autonomous agents, equipped with big data about our behavior collected from the*

Internet of things, work over social media to engage with us on political issues and advance ideological projects. Computational propaganda involves software programs that are interactive and ideologically imbued. They are interactive within the context of a platform. They are ideological, first, in that they are programmed to promote a particular perspective in politically charged conversations and, second, in that they are artifactual evidence of the idea that technology can be used to influence politics. These are almost pure examples of politics in code. Computational propaganda is among the latest, and most ubiquitous, technical strategies to be deployed by those who wish to use information technology for social control. (Woolley & Howard 2016: 4886)

The impact of automated computational propaganda is as complex to unpick as more conventional arguments about the impact of more traditional forms of propaganda, and academic work in this field is only just beginning.

The rise and ongoing demise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has resulted in a great deal of analysis of the resulting propaganda (Zelin 2015; Frampton et al 2017). Analysts have noted different characteristics of ISIS's messaging, for example the reliance on heavily legalistic language and historical precedents (Pelletier et al 2016), and a surprising focus on the domestic life within ISIS territory (Winter 2015). Ingram, writing on militant Islamist propaganda more widely, argued that it has three main functions, to provide supporters with 'systems of meaning', demonstrate credibility, and use 'behavioural levers' to legitimise and encourage violence (Ingram 2016: 1).

Although the use of the Web by terrorist and extremist groups has sparked a degree of moral panic, online communication has also been recognised as a source of vulnerability. The partial anonymity of the Internet has exacerbated the risks involved in participation. Decisions about who can be trusted are often made without access to physical cues, limiting the usefulness of online tools for building trusted networks (Hegghammer 2013; 2014). Just as terrorist and extremist groups have been able to use the Internet to disseminate material, the Internet also serves as a venue for competing material. Scholars

have embraced the propagandistic aspects of soft power to some degree, framing the conflict as a war of ideas and embracing the role of 'information warriors' (Taylor 2012: 362; see also Briggs & Feve 2013; Neumann 2013; Payne 2009; Silverman et al 2016). Such approaches have led to criticisms however. One review of countering violent extremism (CVE) programmes noted the dominance of 'counter-narrative' approaches and identified three questionable assumptions: that violent extremist propaganda leads to violent acts, that counter narratives are crucial to CVE, and that the use of counter-narratives will reduce the threat from violent extremists (Ferguson 2016: 10-15). A later report from the International Centre for Counter Terrorism highlighted these assumptions in making the case that 'counter-narrative theory' had become embedded with policy makers on the basis of little hard evidence (Glazzard 2017).

Although the cheapness and ease of access to online communication is often highlighted in explanations of non-state use of online propaganda, states are also seeking to shape public opinion via the Internet. In response to the communications dimensions of terrorist threats, the UK Government created the Research and Information Communication Unit (RICU) in 2007. Online propaganda has also been highlighted as a key component of Russian foreign policy, and consequently Western efforts to counteract it. The use of 'troll factories' in support of Russian narratives suggests that online propaganda is being taken seriously by governments as well as non-state actors (Walker 2015; Gerber & Zavisca 2016: 79). NATO established the Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence in 2015, arguing that communication was becoming increasingly important to the alliance's mission (Nato StratCom n.d.). The 2016 US Presidential election (among others) was dogged by allegations of the use of digital tools by groups outside the US with the intention of influencing the outcome of the election (Solon 2017). Terrorist attacks in the UK in 2017 were also seen to spark a process of digital influencing by Russian-linked Twitter accounts (Innes 2018). Interventions were made from a range of ideological perspectives, 'on both sides', thus 'amplifying their message and ramping up the level of discord and disagreement within public online debate' (Innes 2018: 33).

However, alongside online propaganda, well-known propaganda outlets such as *Russia Today* also work

to support Russian narratives (Gerber & Zavisca 2016: 82). Such narratives seek to contrast inferior Western values, highlighting the role of Western ideologies in supporting aggressive capitalism, non-traditional lifestyles (homosexuality), and instability (such as around race) (Gerber & Zavisca 2016: 82). There is little empirical data that speaks directly to the effectiveness of this current wave of online state propaganda. Survey data from Russia, Ukraine, Azerbiajan, and Kyrgzstan suggests that some level of anti-Americanism has taken hold, but that public opinion in the former Soviet states is diverse (Gerber & Zavisca 2016: 87). The extent to which these opinions can be attributed directly to propaganda efforts is also unclear (Gerber & Zavisca 2016: 94).

Lastly, there is ongoing discussion of the role of technical platforms in the dissemination of ISIS propaganda. Although publicly accessible social media platforms such as Twitter and Telegram have been favoured as tools to support wide dissemination, and even recruitment and coordination (Bloom 2017; Winter 2015), they are vulnerable to technical interventions (Stern & Berger 2016). The tools of dissemination are controlled by opposing groups, i.e. states and private companies. This has reportedly led to a focus on privacy focused applications and broader migrations to the dark web (Weimann 2016a; 2016b). Extreme right groups have faced similar issues, with important sites in the US and international networks forced off the public internet (McGoogan 2017; Crocker 2017).

Propaganda remains the dominant concept for those attempting to understand how states and sub-state organisations seek to build support and suppress opposition. Social science has offered a range of perspectives on propaganda. However, other disciplines such as psychology have expended greater efforts on attempting to measure its internal mechanisms and effects. Confounding variables and issues around target audiences (i.e. size and accessibility) make this a difficult task. From a social science perspective, propaganda has transitioned from a seemingly all-encompassing super science in the aftermath of the First World War, to something far more limited and conditional.

From the perspective of terrorism, propaganda and violence by sub-state actors are strongly linked in academic theory. Terrorist violence, according to many, is a form of propaganda directed both at target populations and potential supporters. Although technological change has made communication easier, violence is still a core component in attracting attention to causes and groups that feel overlooked. The role of the Internet and the Web in terrorism and extremism is still under debate. Although there has been a great deal of concern about the availability of extreme ideological material online, there is little evidence to suggest that this alone has resulted in more terrorist violence, but the emergence of the digital radical milieu as an audience and potential recruitment pool and base of support for terrorists remains of concern. Such issues are likely to be further augmented by a growing distrust of the web and social media, and the wider focus on the vulnerabilities of democratic processes to external influence in a networked environment. Just as every other facet of life has been shifted online, so too has terrorism and extremism.

In summary, propaganda as a concept has taken a curious journey. From its origins and subsequent slide following the excesses of the First World War, the concept has arguably obtained renewed significance as new communications tools have fallen into the hands of governments, organisations and even individuals. It is worth reflecting on the quotation from H.G. Wells above linking propaganda and technology, and reactions to the current use of communication technology. It is also worth remembering the subsequent limitations that became apparent to propagandists identified by Lasswell and others.

Propaganda represents only one side of a persuasive equation. Rather than brainwashing, propaganda has been identified as heavily dependent on audience reactions and pre-existing schemas and norms in order to work. It is also vulnerable to traps where propaganda and lived realities come into sharp contrast. Laswell's account of the technical aspects of modern communications is also persuasive. Just as the British were able to eek out an advantage with the major cable connection to the United States in the First World War, the tools of social media, the Web, and the Internet itself, are under the sway of largely pluralistic and democratic governments.

This has resulted, to some degree, in extremist groups and movements being hounded from easily accessible services to the dark web and privacy-centric applications.

As a tool for ideological transmission then, propaganda is relatively blunt. Focusing on the content of communication and communication originators, as scholars of propaganda typically do, gives little weight to pre-existing attitudes among audiences. Understanding propaganda can only ever be one component in the wider problem of ideological transmission; insights from propaganda need to be considered alongside other relevant findings, for example the impact of socialisation (see Lee & Knott 2016, 2017) and learning (see Part III below).

2. THE FRAMING OF IDEAS, BELIEFS AND VALUES

Whilst theorists have often risked presenting propaganda as all powerful and able to shape public opinion at the propagandist's will, social movement theory, especially frame analysis, has presented a more limited set of options for groups seeking to raise awareness, gain recruits, and energise followers. Whereas the concept and use of 'propaganda' has been connected more often than not to state-level activity, to warfare and to some extent terrorism, social movement theorists have analysed ideology and collective action at the sub-state level. Communication has been a central component of their deliberations, with frame analysis being the principal approach, based on the idea that a shared culture and/or ideological position which resonates with audiences is needed to support collective action (Fuist 2013). This may enable the mobilisation of new recruits into the group, but may also help sustain the commitment of existing members (McCaffrey & Keys 2000: 43).

In his typology of how culture works in social movement theory, Fuist (2013: 1044) sought to shed light on the process by which 'culture factors into collective action'. He focused on three 'building blocks': culture within sites, as resources and as wider contexts, establishing that:

> *(i) culture renders particular sites fruitful for social movements to mobilize out of; (ii) culture serves as a resource that assists in movement action; and (iii) culture provides wider contexts that shape movement activity. (Fuist 2013: 1044-1045)*

In the discussion of framing that follows, the focus will be on the second of these. It is nevertheless useful to note several points in relation to the other two. First, after setting out the role of culture in churches and denominations and of 'social movement scenes' as bases for mobilisation, Fuist (2013: 1046) concluded that research is still needed on 'how movements are shaped by *pre-existing* culture compared with *emergent* movement culture' (author's own italics). Secondly, how social movements are 'culturally situated' and 'understand the world and act collectively' is informed by wider cultural contexts, and their associated ideologies, norms and values (Fuist 2013: 1048). Tilly's (2002) elaboration of 'repertoires of contention' showed how social movements exploit 'pre-existing claims-making performances that exist in the cultural context, such as petitions, letter-writing campaigns, public demonstrations, boycotts, and sit-ins' (Fuist 2013: 1049). Social movements are not culturally self-contained; they rely on the wider culture to contextualise norms and values, and to provide models for action.

Ideological transmission within social movements – in this case, political and religious organisations – is clearly informed by multiple cultural influences, drawing from the wider cultural context and from the movement's own 'pre-existing' culture, whilst developing new cultural material and modes of communication, for both internal and external use. Turning to his second building block, of culture as resource, Fuist (2013: 1047) noted that, 'researchers have found, for example, that shared culture provides resources that can sustain a movement in times of abeyance […], helps movements connect with potential adherents […], and assists in the selection of tactical choices'. Culture is drawn on as a resource for mobilisation and the achievement of movement goals, for example by the framing of grievances, the construction of a collective sense of identity, and through the use of cultural elements such as narratives, performances and emotions. Exploiting cultural resources in such ways helps movements to 'motivate members, disseminate their message, act collectively, or reach a variety of populations' (Fuist 2013: 1045).

2.1 FRAME ANALYSIS

In a review of the field, Benford and Snow (2000) identified three central dynamics of social movement theory: resource mobilisation, political opportunity and framing (see also Beck 2008; Tuğal 2009). In relation to the latter, they noted that social movement scholars understand framing as 'meaning construction', stating that 'frames help to render events

or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action' (Benford & Snow 2000: 614).

In his early work, Goffman (1975) had described the concept of framing as a series of perspectives intended to give events meaning:

> *When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary. I say primary because the application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or 'original' interpretation; indeed, a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful. (Goffman 1975: 21)*

Collections of frames were also seen as being resistant to change, with even astonishing events, inexplicable by conventional natural and social frames, usually attributed to a lack of information (Goffman 1975: 28): 'It seems that we can hardly glance at anything without applying a primary framework.' (Goffman 1975: 38) Druckman (2001) defines framing thus:

> *Specifically, a framing effect is said to occur when, in the course of describing an issue or event, a speaker's emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions. (Druckman 2001: 1042)*

In essence, frames are a pitch by social movements, designed to explain the way the world works.[2]

Building on their earlier work (Snow & Benford 1988), Benford & Snow (2000: 615-618) discussed the three tasks associated with collective action frames: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation. Diagnostic tasks concern identifying problems, often focusing on victim narratives and injustice

frames (Gamson et al 1982). A further component of diagnostic framing is attributing blame and identifying those responsible for injustices (Benford & Snow 2000: 616). As well as a source of unity, attribution can also be a source of difference and conflict in social movements, with groups fragmenting over who to blame. Prognostic framing puts forward a solution to the diagnosed problem. This can include criticising the solutions proposed by others as well as advancing their own remedies: 'counter framing'. Prognostic framing can be a further source of tension in social movements, and groups with common aims can pursue different strategies to achieve them (Benford & Snow 2000: 617; Benford 1993). Motivational tasks concern moving people from belief to action: a call to arms 'from the balcony to barricades' (Benford & Snow 2000: 615). Benford (1993) identified four motivational 'vocabularies' to encourage recruits, supporters and others to move to action: severity, urgency, efficacy and propriety. These were not always complementary, however: emphasising the severity and urgency of an issue may undermine a sense of efficacy (Benford & Snow 2000: 617).

Comparative work has sought to further underline how framing can differ between social movements, for example by specifying different types of collective action frames, considering the flexibility and scope of frames, and the degree to which different frames resonate with various audiences. Resonance, a combination of credibility and salience, relies on the consistency of the frame, the presence of readily accessible empirical evidence, and the credibility of those purveying the frame (Benford & Snow 2000: 620). The development, generation and elaboration of frames is complex and often contested. A range of factors are involved, including how other movements and the media respond, and disputes within movements, as well as the impact of external events.

As with propaganda, frame construction is not a panacea for explaining social movement formation, ideology and action. Benford and Snow (2000: 628-631; see also Borah 2011) suggested that cultural constraints, political opportunity, and audience effects may all have an impact on framing. In framing theory, audiences, in particular, were granted a role in interpreting and reacting to social movement

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2   *Frames and framing have also been extended to media analysis (e.g. Stout & Buddenbaum 2003; Norris et al 2003). This will not be discussed here.*

frames, with movements bending their frames to fit new circumstances and audiences. Goffman earlier acknowledged that, while common collections of frames constituted a central element of a social group's culture, significant variation between specific frames was likely to occur, for example, among atheists and believers in the same society (Goffman 1975: 27).

Snow and Benford (1992) also suggested the existence of 'master frames' that help explain the clustering that accompanies social movement mobilisations: 'they provide the interpretative medium through which collective actors associated with different movements within a cycle assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate.' (Snow & Benford 1992: 139) Master frames were thought to vary based on their inclusiveness, i.e. if they were highly regimented, or able to incorporate a wide array of ideas within them (Snow & Benford 1992: 140). Their potency was also said to vary depending on a frame's credibility with target audiences, the extent to which the frame aligned with the everyday experiences of audiences, and their 'ideational centrality' or the degree to which the master frame was compatible with existing folklore, myths and stereotypes (Snow & Benford 1992: 141).

The last point, ideational centrality, was strongly emphasised by scholars seeking to apply the concept of master frames. Swart (1995: 446), for example, argued that master frames were defined by their resonance within their historical milieu. Master frames that were 'successful' (i.e. in a range of fields, and in relation to specific mobilisations) were more likely to be adopted by other groups seeking success (Swart 1995: 469). Clusters of social movement activism could thus be explained by the use of a 'culturally potent frame' (Swart 1995: 470) that resonates widely, such as rights or injustice frames (see Benford & Snow [2000: 619] for examples). Furthermore, as master frames are incorporated into diverse movements and adapted for their own circumstances, they become broader and more inclusive, further enhancing their appeal (Swart 1995: 470).

Although experimental evidence for framing effects is powerful, Druckman cautions against seeing such effects as a chance for elites to engage in total manipulation of the public. There are limits on framing effects, and experimental evidence suggests that the impact of issue framing can be moderated based on source credibility (defined as knowledge and trustworthiness) (Druckman 2001). Chong & Druckman (2007a: 103; 2007b) argued that most research was fixated on asymmetric one-sided exposure, with less research on dual situations, in which individuals were exposed to multiple frames in equal measure, and none in asymmetric situations, where subjects would be exposed to multiple frames in unequal quantities. They theorised that, in competitive situations, frames that were repeated more often would be more credible, as would stronger frames, such as those that came from more credible sources, did not contradict prior knowledge, and that resonated with established values (Chong & Druckman 2007: 104). Chong and Druckman (2007: 105) were also critical of how research judged the effectiveness of frames, arguing that comparing their effects against one another risked overlooking situations in which frames mutually contributed to the same outcome.

Empirical work has further highlighted that frames rarely exist within a vacuum. McCaffrey & Key (2000), for example, conducted an analysis of framing by the National Organisation of Women (NOW), a women's rights group in the US with an interest in reproduction and abortion issues. They noted how NOW's rhetoric reacted to the emergence of anti-abortion groups in the US, following legalisation. Three broad types of responses to counter movements were identified (McCaffrey & Key 2000: 44): polarising debates and attempting to vilify opposition, debunking competing ideological frames in order to advance their own agenda, and protecting their own frames from counter attack.

Frames then are a subtler analytical tool than propaganda. While propaganda is often viewed as operating on individuals from the outside, framing (based on Goffman's position) allows for access to internal structures of meaning. Altering the way in which a question or issue is framed for audiences can potentially move opinion. As with propaganda, however, framing is not a panacea. Despite potentially powerful effects, frames are heavily dependent on preconceived ideas and norms, such as folklore and stereotypes. Likewise, frames are not constructed in a vacuum and are often in competition with other attempts to influence public opinion, often from opposition groups.

2.2 FRAMING THEORY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A subset of researchers has sought to apply the insights of social movement theory, including framing theory, to explain violent forms of collective action (della Porta 1988). Framing theory provides benefits for those studying violent extremism by identifying a framework that takes account of factors that motivate and limit collective action (but see also work on the news framing of extremism and terrorism, in Norris et al 2003). Framing in particular is a useful tool for considering the role of culture and emotion in motivating collective action, allowing researchers to apply an ideological layer to its study. Desrosiers (2012), for example, has advocated framing theory as a way to bridge the divide between those studying violent mobilisations as consequences of rational and purposeful decision making by elites (instrumentalist), and those taking a perspective that includes identity, history and symbols (social-psychological). Importantly, framing theory allows for the inclusion of both perspectives, suggesting that the conscious framing of strategic communications still draws on a limited tool box:

> *Frames are never produced ex nihilo [from nothing]. Framers have social backgrounds that shape their reasoning and limit their ability to think 'outside the box' when developing frames. Though framers often strive to distinguish themselves from competitors and therefore benefit from innovating in terms of their frames, innovations are none the less determined in significant part by the existing market-place of ideas. Framing is also limited by publics' social backgrounds, often the same ones as framers. Framing, at least successful framing, is very much dependent on how frames fit a public's beliefs, ideas and understandings. (Desrosiers 2012: 4)*

A similar observation comes from Beck (2008: 1571). He noted an increased focus within social movement theory on the role of non-structural factors such as the creation of collective identity. A social movement approach to terrorism, in Beck's understanding, would place greater emphasis on the role of terrorism in creating and sustaining collective identities. Ramsay

& Holbrook (2015) used framing to suggest more in-depth consideration of another non-structural factor, extreme material and the framing of violence. They argued that, while terrorism studies had traditionally subsumed all representations of violence in extremist material under the concept of the propaganda of the deed, greater nuance was needed. Using the concept of 'violence framing' they suggested that representations of violence could vary and might include both diagnostic and prognostic frames, e.g. suggesting violence as a course of action (Ramsay & Holbrook 2015: 86).

In empirical studies, framing theory has been used widely to analyse the rhetoric of protest movements, for example anti-globalisation groups (Ayres 2004). Analyses have also included the changing frames of Hizballah as they adapted to the end of the Lebanese civil war (Karagiannis 2009), and comparative work looking at shared frames between the Norwegian right-wing terrorist, Anders Breivik, and the wider anti-Islam movement (Berntzen & Sandberg 2014). Snow and Byrd (2007) applied the concept of framing to Islamist militancy. They saw framing as an antidote to approaches that tended to privilege the concept of ideology as something inelastic and universal within movements. Framing, they argued, allowed for greater consideration of the specific 'discursive ideological work' undertaken by groups to mobilise support (Snow and Byrd 2007: 133).

Frame analysis has been applied to work comparing propaganda produced by (US) neo-Nazi and jihadist activists. Comparing works by the most prominent propagandists from each milieu, Morris (2014) further disaggregated diagnostic frames between in-groups and out-groups. In both groups, Morris (2014) noted the identification of external threats to the in-group, and internal threats within the in-group. In both cases internal threats included notional members of the in-group who were ignorant of the threats posed, or unwilling to act (Morris 2014: 177). Morris (2014: 176) also observed similar frames deployed by both jihadists and neo-Nazis:

> *Similarities suggest that how violent extremist groups frame their grievances is not unique among ideologies or groups despite differences in language, culture, history, and geography. A similarity is reflected in the fact that both sets of propagandists are*

not creating new frames, but instead using the same types of diagnostic frames with different variables over time. (Morris 2014: 176)

Framing has not been confined to the analysis of violence, however. Clubb (2016) used framing theory as a tool for highlighting the role of former violent actors in peace-building processes. Drawing on the Northern Ireland conflict, with respect to returning foreign fighters, Clubb argued that a framing perspective allowed for consideration of the changing role of violence for organisations, and that formers could play a role in reframing violence to prevent further youth involvement.

Ideology does play a role insofar as the framings build on and maintain narrative fidelity, but it underplays how framings can be transformed to be developed into a preventative mechanism that resonates with young people. Former combatants realized their conditional framing did not resonate with young people and therefore developed this framing to include elements that de-glamorized violence, yet never de-legitimizing it. (Clubb 2016: 17)

While a focus on propaganda alone is often informative about a group and the claims it is making, framing theory is better integrated into wider theories of mobilisation that are relevant to sub-state groups.

Framing theory offers a more nuanced understanding of ideological transmission than propaganda. While propaganda has been widely acknowledged as limited and bound by culture and norms, framing theory is much more able to take into consideration the wider social and political contexts and their impact on mobilisation.

Framing theory exposes a battle for control of the narratives embedded within propaganda. Framing theory suggests that social movements attempt to develop frames that resonate with their audiences and achieve desired outcomes by exploiting places, history and other resources to influence not just *what* audiences think, but *how*. The empirical evidence suggests that the way in which audiences come to think about an issue can have a powerful impact on their thinking. While not explicitly transmitting a

heavily structured ideology, framing can serve to orientate audiences towards sympathetic positions.

3. TRANSMITTING IDEOLOGY INTERNALLY: LEARNING

Externally-focused communication is only one aspect of how political and religious groups transmit ideology. They also look inwards, in order to pass on ideas and traditions from one generation to the next, to stimulate belief, trust and acceptance of new policies and technological changes, retain members, and build community and commitment. Those involved – central or peripheral participants, new or long-standing – are at different stages in an organisational learning process. They are being trained as members and to fulfil certain roles; they are simultaneously being integrated into their organisation's collective memory and becoming its repositories.

In the case of extremist and terrorist organisations, in addition to the communication of priorities and principles through violence and other forms of external dissemination and action, there is a need to transmit ideology to those inside the organisation, and to those outside who may be willing to deepen their involvement.

> *Terrorists do not just appear 'fully fledged': they become terrorists through involvement and engagement. They have to learn and express learning in various ways. They may engage in technical learning, but may also engage in ideological learning. Evidence of that learning process (through 'talking' or 'doing') can enhance loyalty and commitment to the group and/or ideology. (Horgan 2009: 144-145).*

In what follows we briefly discuss learning theory in general before turning to learning in political and religious organisations. As well as identifying the nature and purposes of organisational learning in such contexts and some of the conditions and limitations, we discuss the relevance of two theoretical interventions, on the politics of learning organisations, and communities of practice as sites of learning. In

the final section in this part, we focus on learning in extremist and terrorist groups.

3.1 LEARNING THEORY

Learning is conceptualised and discussed in diverse ways in multiple disciplines, particularly in education and psychology, but also in management studies, sociology, philosophy and political and religious studies. It is served by an enormous academic literature which it is impossible to do justice to here (Learning Theories 2017). As Illeris (2009) stated at the outset of his edited collection on contemporary theories of learning, there is no commonly accepted definition. However, 'whereas learning traditionally has been understood mainly as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, today the concept covers a much larger field that includes emotional, social and societal dimensions' (Illeris 2009: 1).

Summarising approaches to learning, Pritchard divided the field between behaviourists and constructivists (Pritchard 2008: 4; see also Learning Theories 2017). Behaviourists, he suggested (2008: 7), focus on observable behaviour and draw on theories of conditioning, such as operant conditioning in which positive behaviours are rewarded and negative ones punished. Constructivists are described as more concerned with internal mental processes, seeing learning as the individual results of mental construction (Pritchard 2008: 21). Constructivist approaches rely more heavily on theoretical accounts of learning, for example Piaget's theory of developmental stages, or schema theory, which views knowledge as reducible to mental models that can be adapted based on learning (Pritchard 2008: 26). Some branches of constructivism place greater emphasis on social context, in which the role of teachers is to support student development through dialogue (Pritchard 2008: 30).

In an earlier review, we discussed social learning theory (Lee & Knott 2016: 13-15). In that theoretical perspective, a social component was brought to conceptions of learning, with the focus being on the acquisition of skills through the observation of others (described as modelling) (Bandura, 1971). In several further turns, learning theory has developed to include, for example, transformative learning (Mezirow 1978, 2009), a dimension of adult learning

that enables us to reassess and transform our underlying frame of reference, experiential learning (Kolb 1984), where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, and situated learning (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), which stresses the importance of cultural context and communities of practice for learning as social participation.

In addition to these primary theoretical accounts, other authors have focused more specifically on learning processes. Illeris (2009), for example, presented a model that engaged both the internal and external factors associated with learning. Learning was presented as operating across three dimensions: content, incentives, and the environment, or what is being learned, why, and under what circumstances. These dimensions were further tempered by four types of learning:

- Cumulative or mechanical learning – the learning of isolated information outside a wider context. This is most common early in life when little is known, and in specific situations, such as memorising a PIN code.

- Assimilative learning – learning new elements that are linked to additional pieces of information. New learning is assimilated into existing schemas.

- Accommodative learning – learning that breaks down existing schemas and requires existing knowledge to change in order to incorporate it.

- Transformative learning – learning that is frequently described as personality change, or wider changes in the organisation of knowledge. (Illeris 2009)

Illeris (2009: 15-16) also noted several barriers to learning, described as defence – in the case of information that goes against existing knowledge – ambivalence and resistance.

Although learning has been a subject of interest to researchers in organisational studies for decades (Denton 2002; Smith 2016), the concept of the 'learning organisation' only arose in 1991. A learning organisation is one that 'facilitates the learning of all its members, and continuously transforms itself' (Pedler et al, cited in Coopey 1995: 193). This depends on there being a learning culture which benefits both individuals and the organisation as a whole, which makes room for such things as questioning, experimentation and innovation. As Coopey (1995) noted in his review, the idea of a

learning organisation is aspirational, but that should not blind managers – or scholars, for that matter – to the role of power, control and ideology within organisations. Coopey examined how different actors, especially managers, were able to exploit these factors for their own advantage, through the calculated use of knowledge and resources. 'Actors within an organizational setting', he noted (Coopey 1995: 197), 'are involved in a "dialectic of control" attempting to maintain some semblance of control over their work lives' by the adroit use of power, meaning and normative sanctions.

Ideology was also seen to play an important role. Drawing on Geertz's (1964: 71-72) conception of ideology as the arena concerned with 'the establishment and defense of matters of belief and value', Coopey suggested that the conception of being a learning organisation helped limit social and individual tensions in periods of turbulence (see also Tracey [2016] on institutional logics). In so far as actors were able to share in and jointly own this ideology of organisational learning, they were likely to be better equipped and more willing to accept change and/or the decisions of managers (with the result that the latter could more easily pursue their own goals). As Coopey (1995: 211) acknowledged, however, by buying into this ideology, employees risked being subjected to 'continued obedience, not only in a prohibitive sense but also creatively'. Despite the 'utopian prescriptions' associated with learning organizations, Coopey (1995: 211-212) concluded that the distribution of power within such organisations, the position of managers, and the ability of employees to effect change or be creative seemed unlikely to shift the status quo significantly.

Although his focus was on managerial culture and business organisations rather than on religious and political bodies, Coopey helped shed light more generally on the issues of power, control and ideology within organisations, and their impact on internal learning processes and rhetoric about learning. His contribution is an important reminder of how learning operates in organisations, and how it is necessarily wrought by power relations and attempts at control (with knowledge and resources being used by leaders but also other members). Evidently, even an ideology of participatory learning can be exploited to give a semblance of openness and to generate conformity.

Another field which has yielded benefits for thinking about learning in religious and political organisations has its origins in the work on communities of practice by Lave and Wenger (1991; see also Wenger 1998).[3] A community of practice is 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger (1991: 98). Such communities exist everywhere, and each person belongs to multiple communities at any one time.

Learning is intrinsically related to participating in such communities. It is not a separate act, associated only with classrooms, national curricula and examinations, but is embedded in everyday social practices. In his inventory of social learning, Wenger (1998: fig. 0.1) included four components: learning as belonging (community), learning as doing (practice), learning as experience (meaning) and learning as becoming (identity). For Wenger (1998), the concept of a community of practice was a means of integrating these components. Further, he suggested, participation in such a community had implications for individuals, communities and organisations, as follows:

- For *individuals*, it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities.

- For *communities*, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members.

- For *organizations*, it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization. (Wenger 1998; author's italics and bullet points)

The notion of communities of practice as learning contexts was informed by studies of apprenticeship. In Lave and Wenger's (1991: 95) initial analysis, apprenticeship was seen as granting access to a community ('legitimate peripheral access') and the chance to observe and interact with 'old-timers' as well as other apprentices. It was about learning to become an insider in a community of practice rather than learning *about* practice, with participants learning by drawing on disparate, locally-accessible resources rather than having information transferred

to them by experts (Brown & Duguid 1991: 48). Brown and Duguid (1991: 41), therefore, stressed the importance of 'non-canonical' over 'canonical' practice, and of story-telling over and above the induction of formal workplace knowledge.

In a later challenge to what they saw as the uncritical acceptance in the social sciences of the theory of 'communities of practice as a driver of learning and knowledge generation', Ash and Roberts (2008: 353; see also Hughes et al 2007) reconsidered the types and conditions of organisational knowing in changing working contexts. They offered 'a typology of knowing in action based on observations of differences in organisation, social engagement, spatial dynamic, and mode of innovation or knowledge formation in different clusters of working environment' (Ash & Roberts 2008: 354). In discussion with the research literature on work-based knowledge, they identified four types, 'craft or task-based knowing; epistemic or high creativity knowing; professional knowing; and virtual knowing' (Ash & Roberts 2008: 353). They challenged the idea that such communities of practice needed to be local and face-to-face by showing that social contact and interconnection (admittedly vital) need not depend on spatial proximity.

Political and religious institutions as communities of practice, especially those related to ideological or theological work or education, have been discussed by several researchers (e.g. Bueger 2013; Horgan et al 2017; Hoskins et al 2012; Hundeide 2003; Husband 2005; Johnston 2017; Kenney 2017; Scourfield et al 2013; Verma 2010). Those who utilise this theory in the analysis of terrorist learning will be discussed in section 3.3 below.

3.2 LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

The subject of learning is central for understanding how ideas, beliefs, values and practices are transmitted within political and religious organisations. How do members and supporters acquire the required knowledge and skills, an understanding of the group's traditions and current priorities, and opportunities to rehearse and share its ideology? And how do

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3   *This field was 'unified' in the same year with organisational learning (Brown and Duguid 1991: 41).*

leaders and other decision-makers organise and make available the necessary information, resources and support? How much of this learning is formal and organised, and how much is informal and tacit? How does it relate to behaviour and action?

In *Ideological Transmission I*, on the family (Lee & Knott 2016), we discussed the concept of nurture and the way in which, in families but also in religious bodies, children are socialised and enculturated (i.e. how they learn their group's culture). Most religious and some political organisations have programmes that introduce children and young people to key teachings, practices and values. These are delivered formally through supplementary schools and youth clubs, and, in some cases, through day schools with a particular religious or political focus (Lee & Knott 2017: 30-36; Knott 2018, Chapter 4).

In this review, however, the focus is not on children but on adult learning. With adults, as with children, learning in organisations takes place both formally, through designated programmes and modules, and informally, through some of the mechanisms noted above (social, situated, transformative and experiential learning). Adult learning is 'life-long', with learners overwhelmingly buying into the learning process, both emotionally and materially. Arguably, to a greater extent than children, they are self-regulated and active agents in their own learning (Niemi 2002, 2009).

There is also the question of the nature and purpose of adult learning in religious and political organisations. In the case of childhood nurture, issues of cognitive development, collective identity, embodied knowledge and ideological education are drawn together as the child learns to be a Muslim (Scourfield et al 2013), a young Communist (Mills 2011; Smith 2011) or a member of Hitler Youth (Kater 2004). Although the stages of cognitive development may be less a factor for adults than for children, the other factors no doubt apply. The context will differ – with the family of lesser significance – and the onus will be on personal decision-making, albeit informed by group influence, peer relationships, and social and cultural context. Some adult learners will be adding to the embodied and in some cases doctrinal knowledge they acquired in childhood; they may be becoming more steadfast in their practice, may be reverting after a time away, or converting to a new political or religious identity. Others will be newcomers who need to build from

scratch. They may well have done some independent questing and learning before contacting or joining a group, but will want to be enculturated swiftly rather than remaining an outsider or novice for long. Learning the basics and the lingo will be important for a sense of belonging as well as doctrinal alignment.

From the perspective of political and religious organisations, there are several purposes to adult learning, which may be summarised as follows:

- To spread the word; that is, to share an ideology or worldview, a set of ideas, beliefs, values and practices, to a wider local, national or global audience, for the greater good of the individual, the group and the society, now and in the future;

- To keep the traditions of the group going from one generation to the next through a 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger 2000), a stock of symbols and ideas that can be drawn on when needed to explain issues or events or to bolster collective memory;

- To train a body of individuals able to transmit these traditions, to perform the group's beliefs and rituals, and to be a workforce for those everyday tasks needed to sustain the organisation and its wider community;

- To ensure the organisation's adaptability and openness to what are considered acceptable innovations (practical, technical and technological) in the face of wider social and political change;

- And to enable the group to engage successfully in ideological and in some cases physical debates and contests with others in order to win power, through the judicious and accepted use of symbols, human and material resources, multiple media outlets and platforms, and through public actions, which may include displays and protests, even criminal activities or violence.

Such a diverse set of purposes not only requires a continuing programme of recruitment, but the training of leaders, members and supporters to various levels and types of skill, knowledge and commitment. It involves persuasion and conversion (Beekers 2015; Tracey 2016). Given that, in most cases, participation in political and religious organisations is voluntary, a culture of learning is necessary in which individuals enjoy their involvement, wish to take on new tasks and challenges, and are ready to submit to the group's learning objectives, processes and outcomes

(Galonnier & Rios 2016). Building such a culture in an organisation where members are – in theory – free to become less active or leave entirely is not easy. And sustaining it depends on the benefits (this-worldly and other-worldly, personal and social, political, even economic) being widely known and shared, and clearly and repeatedly articulated. For those involved, participating and learning must themselves be experienced as intrinsically worthwhile and rewarding despite the likely difficulties (Serrat et al 2016). Although this may be the case in general, as noted by Coopey (1995) above, power and coercion are nevertheless inherent in the structures and ideologies of organisations.

The nature of the group itself also makes a difference to learning processes and their effectiveness. In tightly-knit and/or hierarchical organisations, leaders may be able to discipline members and control the discourses and practices related to learning (Barker 1984; Hunt 2003). More fluid networks and movements with a less hierarchical structure may place greater onus on individuals to sustain their own involvement and learning and to contribute to meeting the needs of the group, but with support and resources from an organised centre or highly motivated leaders or subgroups (Johnston 2017). Wider political and religious milieus will be looser still, with participants entirely in charge of their own learning, with guidance being *ad hoc* and resources dispersed. Hierarchy, power, degree of independence and persuasion play a significant part in how learning works in organisations and in who controls the practice and discourse of learning (see below).

Furthermore, the nature of the learning offered and a learner's capacity to integrate and use it will depend of the length and stage of their involvement and on factors such as trust, range of roles and responsibilities, and social mobility within the organisation (Coopey 1995). The conjunction of the learner's understanding with the logic of the organisation will depend on the latter's capacity to make strategic use of emotion and performance to persuade the former to revise their meaning system (Beekers 2015; Tracey 2016).

The discussion of several cases below shows how these factors work in practice. Barker (1984) examined the impact of entry level learning in the Unification Church; Galonnier & Rios (2016)

analysed 'pedagogies of conversion' in Islamic and evangelical Christian groups in the US; and Johnston (2017) explored how spiritual communities and their practitioners learnt to cope with failure. Serrat et al (2016) considered adult learning in a variety of Spanish political organisations. Although these studies deserve a closer reading, the discussion below focuses specifically on what the authors say about the nature and role of ideological learning, how they see it contributing to the purposes outlined above, and the extent to which it bears out points made earlier about organisational learning and communities of practice.

In her enduring account of why and how people join a new religious movement (*The Making of a Moonie: Brainwashing or Choice?*), Barker (1984) focused on the Unification Church's (UC) camps and workshops (2-day, 7-day and 21-day events) as the principal mechanism for recruiting newcomers. She was interested in the effectiveness of the Church's programmes for the transmission of its teachings, in whether its practices were coercive, and how potential recruits reacted to the lectures, the people and the atmosphere at the workshops (cf. Hunt 2003). Her (1984: 146) research showed how, from a large pool of potential recruits (in the London study, more than 1,000 in 1979), only a small proportion joined and stayed for more than one week (10 per cent), with half of those leaving within two years. The remaining cohort of Moonies included home church and student participants as well as full time/live-in members. If the UC had been coercing or brainwashing those attending workshops (as anti-cult bodies and the media claimed at the time), then those techniques were not proving effective (Barker 1984: 147). Furthermore, the Church's transmission process – at least at the initial stage of delivery – was not successful in winning people over to the movement or its teachings (the *Divine Principle*). There was a high 'Unification failure rate' (Barker 1984: 144).

Barker (1984: 150-151) asked those who had attended initial 2-day workshops what they liked and disliked about them. In her analysis, she distinguished between 'non-joiners', 'leavers' (those who joined but left within a few weeks) and 'full-time joiners'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was leavers and full-time joiners – those who made an initial commitment to the movement – who rated the lectures highest (above the people and the general atmosphere). Those who didn't join were more impressed by the people and the

atmosphere. Very few of them accepted the ideology as completely true, though a number accepted some of the lecture content (Barker 1984: 151). Barker (1984: 111) noted that there were 'fairly frequent warnings that some bits of the Principle [would] be difficult to accept at first hearing': '"Listen – don't try to accept, but don't deny"', they were told. To help in this process, participants heard from members who had had spiritual experiences that had helped them overcome their reservations.

Of those who made an initial commitment, several left because they were afraid of being indoctrinated or because they came to believe the teachings were false. The converts – those who stayed on – 'emphasized the importance of the teachings at the expense of the influence of the Moonies themselves'; they also acknowledged that they had learned to commit to the leader (the Revd Moon), rather than accepting his charisma from the outset (Barker 1984: 163-165).

In addition to the impact of UC teachings, Barker (1984: 181; cf. Hundeide 2003: 113) also examined the effect of 'love-bombing' on those who came into contact with the movement, asking whether it was appropriate to see it as coercive: wanting to believe something because one's friends say it is true. From her interviews it was clear that many short and long-term Moonies were initially attracted because of the happy demeanour of members and the apparently loving community on offer, but 'friendship and loyalty can be used to exert considerable pressure upon the Moonie to fall into line' (Barker 1984: 180, 188).

These findings are instructive for assessing how learning works within a religious group. Converts and those who chose not to join had very different ideas about the ideological content on offer, with the former emphasising its importance, and the latter remaining unconvinced (cf. Hunt [2003] and Tracey [2016] on participant responses to the Christian Alpha course, and Beekers [2015] on responses to Islamic pedagogy). Leavers, like converts, rated the teachings highly; they reported that the people not the ideas were the problem. And converts, contrary to expectations perhaps, were not immediately convinced by the leader. Acceptance of charismatic authority was something that had to be learned (see also coping with failure in Johnston (2017), below). The importance of the social context was also evident, with support and friendship being an initial attraction, but later a

source of pressure (see Coopey 1995). Despite talk of openness and the high failure rate, the power of affective bonds had an impact on conformity.

In her conclusion, Barker (1984: 244) summarised what the UC offered a new recruit:

> [...] the chance to be part of a Family of like-minded people who care about the state of the world, who accept and live by high moral standards, who are dedicated to restoring God's Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It offers him the opportunity to belong; it offers him the opportunity to do something that is of value and thus the opportunity to be of value. (Author's own capitals and italics)

Barker's analysis preempted Wenger's (1998) conception of learning in a community of practice, of learning as belonging (community), doing (practice), experience (meaning) and becoming (identity). As she made clear, however, whilst this idealism appealed to some young seekers, others found it unconvincing, boring or inappropriate (depending on their values); they decided against joining, or left within weeks. They were unable to align their beliefs and values with those of the Church, despite the social and affective bonds made (cf. Tracey 2016). Those outside the Church, who already had strongly negative views, interpreted its process as 'brainwashing' and its recruits as in need of 'deprogramming'.

Whilst Barker examined learning in the context of recruitment, Galonnier and Rios (2016: 59) focused on the pedagogies of teaching and learning in religious classes and on 'how converts learn to become religious people' in American Da'wah, a Sunni Muslim organisation, and Mountain Church, an evangelical Christian congregation (see also Beekers [2015] on 'persuasive pedagogies'). Although they found differences in doctrines or 'know-what', they found similarities in pedagogical advice or 'know-how'.

From observations and discussions with class members, they developed a model of the learning process (summarised in Figure 1, with quotations from Galonnier & Rios 2016). They identified three important themes for adult convert learning: time, belonging and bodily practice. They noted that class instructors stressed the long-term nature of conversion and the need for 'commitment, dedication

and learning', and chose their learning metaphors accordingly ('a marathon'; 'pace yourselves'). As in Barker's study, they found instructors offering their own experiences to help class members deal with doubts and hesitations (Galonnier & Rios 2016: 68). Although this was a 'transformative learning' process (Mezirow 2009), it was not understood as a 'road to Damascus' moment, but as a long-haul journey.

groups. The stress placed by instructors on time and commitment, community belonging and participation, and embodied practice and knowledge all make sense in the context of initial convert training. Whether these strategies hold true as the challenge turns from recruitment to retention, and once newcomers become long-term members, remains to be seen. Some religious organisations recognise this problem

TEACHING STRATEGY	LESSON CONTENT	LEARNING METAPHORS & METHODS
Time	Conversion was presented as a long-term process; faith, commitment and submission were all seen as important	• Conversion was explained as "a marathon not a sprint" • "Pace yourselves!"
Belonging	Conversion was presented as communal; collective prayers, mosque and church attendance, and community participation were stressed	• Reciting together • Learning religious greetings and new shared vocabulary • Mastering the "do's and don'ts" of being a Muslim/Christian • Using ceremonies as collective learning events

Figures 1: The convert learning process (based on Galonnier & Rios 2016)

Learning was framed in terms of belonging to a new religious community (Galonnier & Rios 2016: 69). This meant converts overcoming or ridding themselves of old habits and ways of acting and taking on new, more acceptable ones (cf. Tracey 2016). Tips were given by instructors to 'aid integration' (Galonnier & Rios 2016: 75). New converts needed to know how to talk and behave appropriately; they had to learn the performance of a new self (Galonnier & Rios 2016: 72). As Scourfield et al (2013; cf. Beekers 2015) found for Muslim children, religious identity was informed by embodied practice. This was no less true for American Muslim and Christian adult converts, and Galonnier and Rios (2016: 72) found this idea was shared by the instructors themselves. They devoted more time to teaching how to practice than what to believe; and 'homework was systematically designed to help converts transform new practices into daily routines' (Galonnier & Rios 2016: 72).

Galonnier and Rios's identification of the teaching strategies used by instructors in the induction and formation of new converts has potential for the analysis of convert experience in other locations and

and develop learning packages for those who wish to renew or refresh their commitment, knowledge and spiritual practice. In other cases, in the absence of an alternative, some revitalise and deepen their faith by going back to basics and taking beginners' courses (e.g. Hunt [2003: 86] on committed Christians and the Alpha course). This is important for the individuals involved, but is also vital for intergenerational transmission within the organisation, and for securing its 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger 2000).

More research is needed to examine what strategies are appropriate in this second learning phase, when 'assimilative learning' takes over from 'transformative learning' (Illeris 2009). One relevant study is Johnston's (2017) research on how two religious organisations (an Integral Yoga studio and a Catholic prayer house) sought to promote persistence, and how their members struggled to implement a disciplined, daily practice. Her research asked how, in a community context, common feelings of failure and shortcoming were translated into spiritual practice rather than disillusionment and disengagement.

My data suggest that meaning making around failure (and success) involves more than causal arguments about why these experiences occur. Shared frameworks also serve to define what counts as success versus failure, and to both evaluate […] and contextualize […] these experiences. I find that these communities promote a vision of apprenticeship that anticipates failure, redefining challenges and obstacles as constitutive features of spiritual formation. (Johnston 2017: 357)

How feelings and experiences were interpreted and practitioners interacted were central to their continued engagement. This process was supported by teachers and texts in an attempt 'to (re)set expectations regarding the content, structure, and speed of spiritual formation' (Johnston 2017: 364). The mantra of 'just do it' was repeatedly used to get across the idea that failure could be transformed through the repetition of practice.

Johnston's research suggests that the pedagogical strategies used in the early stages of an initiate's spiritual journey (time, belonging and bodily practice) continue to have salience later with the persistence of anxieties about failure, struggle and falling short of expectations. The shared interpretation and language of failure serves as an important identity marker and a sign of spiritual growth (Johnston 2017: 367; cf. Hundeide 2003: 113). Endurance, collective endeavour and a commitment to practice remain vital for personal formation and sustaining the community. Situating her research in the theoretical context of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), Johnston concluded that, 'communities of practice—teachers, peers, and texts— offer adherents a set of shared interpretive tools for characterizing the problems they encounter, as well as deliberating, deciding on, and executing responses that "fit" with their goals and aspirations' (Johnston 2017: 368).

Whilst this may hold true for these communities, it is unlikely that all religious organisations have an official discourse of failure and a strategy which accommodates those who struggle or have doubts. It may be the case, however, that some organisations subtly combine an external rhetoric of success and

an internal 'vision of apprenticeship that anticipates failure' (Johnston 2017: 357). Arguably, the willingness and ability to incorporate failure is a sign of a mature organisation.

In these three cases, the focus has been on discreet and bounded religious organisations with their own objectives, traditions, memberships and modes of learning. As we noted earlier, however, in looser networks, the approach to learning inevitably differs, with the onus falling on individual practitioners to chart their own journey and identify useful resources, with support and guidance from network organisers, often online. The provision of appealing social spaces to meet, practice together or learn from religious experts is likely to be contingent on the initiative of highly motivated individuals, and may be irregular or infrequent (Beekers 2015). Online forums and bookshops might well provide links in the learning chain, enabling seekers to share experiences, resource their learning and practice, and feel that they are part of a movement.

The loosening of commitment to formal organisations has also been observed in research on political parties and labour movements (Mycock & Tonge 2012; O'Toole 2016). Mycock & Tonge (2012; Rainsford 2014) have shown the growing gulf that exists between such organisations and young people, with the former continuing to focus on older people as political actors and voters, and the latter turning to different forms of political activism, such as volunteering and direct action. As O'Toole (2016: section 5) noted, the direction of travel is not towards building a political organisation, but to staging events and generating experiences, as in the cases of 'Critical Mass, Reclaim the Streets, the anti-G8 protests or the Occupy movement, which had no central organizing body, spokesperson, or indeed common political or ideological agenda' (O'Toole 2016: section 5). Such shifts in political action and organisation have necessarily had consequences for ideological learning and transmission, which have become oriented towards single issue, DIY and tech-savvy knowledge and skills rather than the traditional political ideologies and practices of the left or right.

Research is needed on the modes of participatory learning associated with these new forms of political activism. What knowledge and skills do individuals

acquire in the process of participation? And how do staged events and their associated social networks consolidate and transmit ideological material and learning about activism, if not across generations, then at least from one event to another?

One group of scholars (Serrat et al 2016) has conducted recent research on learning and political participation, although their focus has been on older people and bounded groups. They looked in detail at the informal learning of Spanish elders in three kinds of organisations: political parties and trade unions; neighbourhood associations; and single-issue groups, such as those campaigning for independence for Catalonia, feminist or human rights issues. Results from open-ended questionnaire data enabled the researchers to differentiate between types of informal learning and to map these across the different organisations (Serrat et al 2016: 175). Building on earlier work by Duguid et al (2013), they identified political learning, social learning and instrumental learning, using their data to further elaborate these types. For example, in terms of social learning, they noted five themes, 'the ability to listen to and respect others' opinions, a sense of solidarity with and awareness of others, recognition of the importance of social harmony, appreciation for the companionship of others, and integration into the community' (Serrat et al 2016: 176). It was in locally-based and community-focused neighbourhood associations that participants most reported social learning (Serrat et al 2016: 182).

Political learning from participation was clustered around three themes, 'an enhanced understanding of the social and political reality of their community, an appreciation of the value of collective action, and an enhanced ability to be assertive and defend their rights' (Serrat et al 2016: 177). Participants in single-issue organisations were most likely to report political learning in general, though those in political parties and trade unions were more likely to have learnt to defend their rights (Serrat et al 2016: 182). Serrat el al noted that,

> *This may be explained by the nature of these groups; first, as nationally focused organizations, single-issue organizations may provide greater scope for learning about broader political issues than neighborhood associations. Second, being less centrally incorporated into political structures than*

> *political parties and trade unions, those who become involved may have less initial knowledge about broader political issues than those joining political parties and may therefore gain more such knowledge. (Serrat et al 2016: 182)*

Finally, in respect of instrumental learning, the researchers identified three themes related to the development of participatory skills and abilities: 'an enhanced ability to work with other people, acquisition of practical and technical skills, and improved communication skills and confidence.' (Serrat et al 2016: 178) Again, those in single-issue groups were the most likely to report this type of learning, with a greater number of women than men reporting such gains (Serrat et al 2016: 183).

The researchers concluded that 'learning through democratic participation not only offers informal learning and growth but also strengthens and develops the quality of participation' (Serrat et al 2016: 184). It is likely – though research has yet to be conducted to test this – that democratic participation in looser social formations (networks, dispersed movements, street protests etc) would offer similar learning opportunities and gains. The 'radical teacher' literature certainly suggests this (e.g. Entin et al [2013] on Occupy and education; DiSalvo [2013] on political education; Dittmar & Annas [2017] on public pedagogies). However, caution is needed to avoid assumptions that 'progressive' movements necessarily provide equal opportunities for all, and that they avoid the traps mentioned earlier in relation to organisational learning, of social coercion, top-down transmission and ideological domination (Barker 1984; Coopey 1995; cf. DiSalvo 2013).

3.3 LEARNING AND IDEOLOGICAL TRANSMISSION: PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Although scholars from a range of disciplines – especially management studies and educational studies – have contributed to theoretical and empirical research on learning in organisations, when it comes to political and religious groups, research is diffuse and underdeveloped. Useful findings and analysis have had to be excavated from broader studies, as few researchers have made learning in political and/or

religious organisations the direct focus of their work (though see Galonnier & Rios 2016; Serrat et al 2016; Tracey 2016). We have used studies whose remit was not learning *per se* but, for example, recruitment, coping with failure or institutional decline, and we acknowledge the likelihood that other studies of religious and political organisations might also indirectly offer material of interest.

Given this limitation, what have we found of value in the work we have consulted so far?

In 3.2, we discussed – somewhat hypothetically – the purposes of adult learning in religious and political organisations. We have found many of these endorsed in the research literature.

In Wenger's work on communities of practice, the rationale for individual, community and organisational learning was set out, and it was clear that their interests were intertwined. In the wider literature, learning – both in formal classes and workshops, or informally through bodily practice and ritual – was shown to be geared to recruitment (Barker 1984; Hunt 2003), conversion to a new worldview or institutional logic (Barker 1984; Beekers 2015; Tracey 2016), individual spiritual progress (Beekers 2015; Johnston 2017), and the development of wider instrumental skills (Serrat et al 2016). Coopey (1995) and Tracey (2016), coming from organisational studies, related learning to the need of organisations to sustain themselves by gaining acceptance for their 'institutional logic' or ideology; Barker (1984) showed how Unification Church recruits were introduced to the *Divine Principle* and over time expected to embrace its doctrines and theology, and then to pass these on to others. Hervieu-Léger's (2000) theorisation of a 'chain of memory' – which deserves more attention than we have given it here – lends weight to these findings. Organisations must find ways not only to sustain themselves in the present but to remain relevant going forward, and this requires dynamic teaching and learning.

The cases we discussed also contributed to analysing other aspects of organisational learning. In light of their need to train up members/participants, what strategies (pedagogies) do organisations use? What are the components of the learning on offer in religious and political organisations? How do learners respond? And, finally, is the learning effective for meeting an organisation's purposes?

In voluntary groups, as in companies and other work-based organisations, both individuals and organisations have something to gain from learning. It is in the interests of both that the learning is properly targeted and effectively delivered. Of the literature we considered, it was Galonnier & Rios (2016) who contributed most to examining the learning strategies (of time, belonging and bodily practice) of those religious organisations that sought to incorporate new converts (cf. Barker), and Johnston (2017) who focused on how organisations responded practically and discursively to practitioners' sense of failure. In these cases, what was clear was that attention was paid by trainers to pedagogical issues – to the strategies and practices that would help learners to grow as religious practitioners, to be incorporated into the wider organisation, and to stay involved even when things got tough.

Several researchers focused on further breaking down organisational learning into its component parts, noting types of learning for individual participants (Serrat et al 2016), distinct types of micro-institutional work and knowledge (Tracey 2016; Ash & Roberts 2008), and the various components of social learning in communities of practice (Wenger 1998). The kind of organisation in which people participated was found to affect the type of learning benefits gained, whether social, political or instrumental (Serrat et al 2016); and emotional and performative work were seen to be important for connecting participants to institutional logics (Tracey 2016; cf. Beekers 2015). Theorists of social learning argued from an apprenticeship model for the inclusion of learning as belonging, doing, experience and becoming (Wenger 1998), with later researchers exploring these further in relation to particular 'communities of practice' (Johnston 2017; see also Barker 1984, and Horgan et al 2017; Hundeide 2003; Kenney 2017 below).

With the stress in the 'communities of practice' literature being on learning to become an insider and on 'non-canonical' rather than 'canonical' approaches (Brown & Duguid 1991: 48; Lave & Wenger 1991), an important corrective came from scholars who stressed the 'dialectic of control' in organisations, and the interplay of power, institutional ideology and tacit coercion in the approaches used by managers/leaders in relation to employees/recruits (Coopey 1995; cf. Barker 1984). What was clear, moreover, was that neither aspirational ideologies nor managerial

strategies were entirely effective, with many learners in voluntary organisations failing to align their thinking and practice with the theology or institutional logic on offer (Barker 1984; Hunt 2003; Tracey 2016). Some retained their earlier views, some became negative or alienated, and only a minority converted, and were willing – temporarily at least – to explore new beliefs, practices and identities.

We must conclude that, if large numbers of participants remain to be persuaded, the learning (and teaching) on offer is only partially effective in meeting the purposes of organisations. A high failure rate must have implications for ideological transmission and future institutional survival. Although not for discussion here, a wider literature on the demise of new religious movements bears this out (e.g. Bromley & Hammond 1987; Currie 2016; Miller 1991). Furthermore, as we noted earlier, with the political landscape of youth moving from parties and trade unions towards more spontaneous, direct and online forms of political activism (Mycock & Tonge 2012; O'Toole 2016; Rainsford 2014), the traditional routes of ideological transmission and organisational reproduction appear to have been disrupted.

3.4 LEARNING AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The academic literature on learning potentially has considerable relevance for research on terrorism and extremism, though this has yet to be fully realised. There is a subset of research that considers learning in terrorist organisations, but there is a wider body of literature on terrorism and extremism in which learning issues are discussed (but without reference to the concept of learning or the wider literature on the subject). Here, however, we will discuss the work of those scholars who are explicit about their understanding of learning or learning-related issues, whether in the guise of information or knowledge acquisition, creativity and innovation, or the process of becoming a committed insider.

Jackson et al (2005), in a two-volume report published by the RAND Corporation, took an organisational learning approach to the question of terrorist learning. Here, organisational learning was characterised as four sub-processes: information acquisition,

interpretation, distribution, and storage (Jackson et al 2005: 10). These aspects of learning were further broken down. Information acquisition was presented as potentially coming from both external sources – through vicarious experiences, cooperation with other organisations, advice from outside experts, and external technology – and internal sources, including information passed down from others within the organisation, direct experience, and internal development. Knowledge interpretation was described as informed by current, potential future, and previous activities. On distribution, Jackson et al (2005: 13-14) noted the risks of overly broad circulation of knowledge, suggesting that the more actors with access to it, the greater the variations in interpretation were likely to be. Finally, the storage of information was discussed, focusing on its accomplishment through language, symbols and rituals, organisation structure, operating guides, and external repositories such as the Internet (Jackson et al 2005: 14). Jackson et al (2005: 15) also presented terrorist learning as dynamic, responsive to changing situations, and requiring adaptability from groups.

One case study of terrorist learning presented in the RAND publication featured the Japanese group, Aum Shinrikyo, and its experience in belligerently resisting its critics. Parachini (2005; see also Reader 2000) noted the confrontational approach of Aum's leader, Shoko Asahara, in dealing with rival religious organisations, and the pressure Aum was able to bring to bear in securing recognition from the Japanese government. Together, these tactics affirmed Asahara's view that aggressive opposition was the key to prevailing (Parachini 2005: 16). Parachini (2005: 19) noted, however, that the hierarchical structure of Aum may have limited its capacity as a learning organisation. Although Aum became notorious for seeking weapons of mass destruction, Parachini suggested that there was little hard evidence of these efforts, and that, despite Aum's considerable resources and ambition, the results were relatively meagre. However, early failures, such as a failed 1993 release of anthrax, could be interpreted as learning experiences, and as opportunities for Aum members to obtain first-hand experience of releasing a biological weapon. Similarly, there was evidence that Aum was able to test the nerve agent (sarin) used in the 1995 Tokyo subway attack at a remote sheep ranch in Australia prior to the attack (Parachini 2005: 22).

Another key learning moment for Aum may have come from external human resources in the form of a visit by a Russian chemical weapons expert to the group (Parachini 2005: 24).

More than a decade on from the work of Jackson et al (2005), Kettle and Mumford (2017) turned to the question of terrorist learning, arguing that, despite research on aspects of the learning process, no unifying framework for analysing terrorist learning had been proposed. Their aim, therefore, was to fill that gap. They (2017: 524-525) set their framework within the wider context of approaches to learning in multiple academic disciplines, especially cognitive psychology, organisational theory, theories of behaviour and constructivist approaches, suggesting that previous work on terrorist learning had been lax in applying existing knowledge. Rejecting earlier definitions as too narrow, too focused on behavioural change, or on group benefits, they defined terrorist learning as 'the acquisition of knowledge to inform terrorist related activities in the future' (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 530), and considered the agents or learners, the processes of learning and the outcomes.

In Kettle and Mumford's framework, terrorist learning was measured in the form of outcomes, described as 'lessons' (2017: 527-528). A lesson might be either positive or negative, and either explicit or tacit. Knowledge of bomb-making might be an example of an explicit lesson, whereas Tamil Tiger commanders taking inspiration from Hollywood action films might represent a tacit lesson (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 528). Lessons were also seen as differing between tactical and operational levels, which the authors connected with distinctions proposed by educational theorists between surface and deep learning (2017: 529).

Kettle and Mumford identified four types of agents – individuals, groups, generations and organisations – and suggested that earlier studies had generally focused on organisational learning as opposed to learning by individuals, small groups and wider generational milieus, despite all being necessary for a complete picture of terrorist learning (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 530-531). Drawing on the work of Jackson et al (2005) and others, in terms of the terrorist learning process, they stipulated four stages: identification (including both the acquisition and interpretation of a lesson), distribution (the sharing of the lesson with other learners), retention (when a lesson is recorded for future use), and implementation (the lesson has been learned and the agent is ready to put it to use) (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 531-533). The source of terrorist learning could be either external or internal, and based on formal routine lessons, or informal learning through extraordinary events (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 533)

Kettle and Mumford sought to bring together previously disparate advances on the who, how and what of terrorist learning, and to produce a comprehensive and coherent framework for identifying agents, processes and outcomes, and potentially for intervening in the learning process. Breaking down terrorist learning in this way reflects aspects of our discussion in 3.2 and 3.3 above, though arguably any model of terrorist learning would do well to incorporate some of the broader issues identified in the studies we looked at. After all, terrorist learning occurs in a context of wider organisational learning: within an extremist group or network not all the 'lessons' identified, shared, retained and implemented will be directed towards acts of terror; some will serve other ends, and those too might impact on the move to violence. Despite the recognition of tacit lessons and learning from errors, a high degree of terrorist intentionality seems to be implied in the framework, yet other research on organisational learning suggests a broader range of learning motivations, types and methods directed at a more diverse set of outcomes or purposes (Wenger 1998; Serrat et al 2016; Tracey 2016). Isolating terrorist outcomes from others may not be straightforward or helpful. Furthermore, despite the recognition of different types of learning agent and the interactions between them, discussion of the political, ideological, social and affective forces operating on learning within organisations was absent from the framework (cf. Hundeide [2003] and Horgan et al [2017] below). The impact of these forces on how learning is processed and the extent of its effectiveness would be worthy of consideration.

Much of the literature on terrorist learning is focused on operational rather than ideological learning (but see Wilner & Dubouloz 2011). Kettle and Mumford (2017), despite their reference to the acquisition of knowledge directed at future terrorist activities, described terrorist learning mostly in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, without consideration of the way in which actors impose ideological meaning

on terrorist activity or the impact of terrorism on wider audiences.

> *The aim of learning is to build on successes, avoid past pitfalls and stay ahead of the learning curve of competitors and enemies in terms of approaches, tactics, technology and skills. It is about increasing accuracy and efficiency and, therefore, in this sense learning can act as both a form of intelligence and a force enabler and multiplier. (Kettle & Mumford 2017: 523)*

Gill et al (2013: 126), in their work on malevolent creativity, likewise stipulated a concern with innovation in relation to operational tactics, that is, with 'a terrorist organization's adoption of an entirely new method, mode or means of violence'. They acknowledged the part played in the innovation process by creative thinking about new tactics, such as 'who to target and how to deliver the attack' (Gill et al 2013: 126, 130; cf. Crenshaw [2010] on the adoption of new objectives), but this was largely confined to the early stages of the process.

It seems likely, however, that the various stages and the associated deliberations about targets, tactics, methods and implementation are all ideologically-inflected. This is not to raise the status or priority of ideology, but simply to recognise that a group's beliefs, norms and values tend to find their way into decisions about how the means devised and adopted by groups relate to their proposed ends or objectives (cf. Wilner & Dubouloz 2011). And, in fact, this is borne out in several cases discussed by Gill et al (2013; cf. Orsini 2012) to illustrate their argument. They wrote, for example, that 'the novelty of suicide bombings and the symbolic power and martyrdom narratives inherent in them played a key role in ensuring their relevance to their consumer audience' (Gill et al 2013: 132-133). They noted that new tactics were open to resistance from broader supporting populations on ideological grounds, as had been the case in the proposed use of condoms in the PIRA's preparation of incendiary devices (Gill et al 2013: 140). Furthermore, they recognised the importance of both 'organisational ties and ideological similarities' for innovation through the replication of a like-minded group's tactics (Gill et al 2013: 140).

Where accounts of learning in terrorist and extremist organisations have focused on ideological dimensions, they have also gravitated towards describing learning in terms of communities of practice (see above; Brown & Duguid 1991; Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Studies which have done so have included Hundeide (2003), Horgan et al (2017), Christensen (2015a) and Kenney (2017). Kenney, for example, drew on the concept in his examination of learning within the Salafi jihadist network, al-Muhajiroun. We will return to his analysis in Part IV.

The original concept of communities of practice has been critiqued within the terrorism literature as being overly focused on skill acquisition without sufficiently addressing broader social considerations including the emotional and ideological aspects of participation. In his account of 'committed insiders', Hundeide (2003) suggested that in some groups, in addition to the mastery of a skill, a deeper level of engagement ('deep commitment') included demonstrations of loyalty, personal sacrifice, and demonstrable emotional commitment to the cause (cf. Christensen 2015a, 2015b; Tracey 2016). Based on accounts of far-right groups, as well as child soldiers in Angola, Hundeide (2003: 108) noted that the role of informal and tacit learning applied to more than the acquisition of skills, but extended to a broader range of factors, including values and opinions.

The stages identified by Hundeide (2003) in the process of 'becoming a committed insider' in the context of military terror resonated with those that had already been described by researchers of counter-cultural or new religious groups (NRMs) (e.g. Barker 1984; Reader 2000; see also Dawson [2009] and Ferguson & Binks [2015] who explicitly drew on research on NRMS and religious conversion for the study of radicalisation). These stages included: contact with charismatic leaders; initiation and the adoption of identifying marks and symbols; redefinition of the past and adoption of new values, including 'demonization of the enemy'; sacrifice and hardship, including dissociation from previous relationships; loyal participation in the new way of life; the demonstration of commitment through actions; new status and role achieved (Hundeide 2003: 113-114). Far from being confined to the acquisition of operationally-targeted information and skills, the move from being an outsider to becoming a fully-fledged and committed member of a terror

organisation involves learning in a community of practice from charismatic figures and other skilled insiders. It encompasses expressive, emotional and ideological shifts, and the fulfilment of increasing demands, loyalties, sacrifices and commitments (Hundeide 2003: 121; see also Horgan 2009; Horgan et al 2017; Wilner & Dubouloz 2011).

Following Hundeide's (2003: 114-120) discussion of these stages in relation to child soldiers in Angola, Horgan el al (2017) employed the model in their research on children's incorporation into the violence of the Islamic State, noting the process of socialisation,

> *from the initial, peripheral contact with ISIS personnel, through more focused, consistent engagement and being accepted as an apprentice, redefining the past, introduction to new values (via schooling and selection), to hardship, isolation, dissociation and ritual (subjugation), right through to final tests of loyalty (inherent in specialization and stationing). There are tangible benefits associated with that deepening of commitment (i.e. clothing, food, shelter, protection) and the child may receive significant social and psychological rewards in the form of status, identity and respect in addition to addressing his (or her) basic needs. (Horgan et al 2017: 658)*

According to Horgan et al (2017: 658; cf. Lave & Wenger 1991), the concept of the 'community of practice' offers a means of understanding how children make the transition 'from passive bystanders to fully fledged, active members of the movement', and helps dissect the social learning that occurs within it. Furthermore, seen through this theoretical lens (and refracted through Hundeide's staged model), the issues for children's disengagement and reintegration emerge as complex and challenging (Horgan et al 2017: 658-659; see also Hundeide 2003: 119-120; Christensen 2015b).

As Hundeide (2003) and Horgan et al (2017) have suggested, learning in extremist organisations may often be centralised and top-down: 'terror is the commander's means of control […] obedience and surrender become the key to personal survival and adaptation.' (Hundeide 2003: 116) The hierarchy

and discipline involved in the running of ISIS was evident in the inclusion of Salafi jihadist ideology in the curriculum, exposure to violence, and the 'intense indoctrination' of children (Horgan et al 2017: 657). In the case of other extremist groups, however, different models have been used. In Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a non-violent Islamist organisation in the UK, ideological learning was a formalised group process involving instruction by leaders through collective study sessions (*halaqah*) designed to bring about a 'new cognitive perspective' in recruits (Wali 2017: 37). In the Hamburg Cell (Everton 2016), radicalisation was a peer-to-peer process, with members learning from one another and becoming closer in their views and commitment to action through religious practice and discussion, singing martyrdom songs, speaking in Arabic, and reaffirming shared norms (Everton 2016: 204). Although members of the cell later participated in training camps, in the initial stages, learning was restricted within the cell as members were encouraged 'to interact more with one another, limiting their group's ties to outsiders, and recruiting primarily through strong ties' (Everton 2016: 210).

The far-right street protest group, the English Defence League (EDL), approached ideological learning in a still more decentralised fashion. Participation in the EDL was often a catalyst for ideological learning. However, the chaotic and dispersed nature of the group meant that learning was informal, with little evidence of any centralised curriculum (Busher 2015: 88; cf. Christensen 2015a: 57-62). Nevertheless, more knowledgeable and credible activists, often those with experience of other anti-Islam organisations, did have some status in the movement (Busher 2015: 89).

Learning in any organisation is conditioned by the information and resources made available to learners. In extreme groups, members are exposed to some items and forbidden material deemed unacceptable. For example, in the EDL, traditional racist, far-right content was often censored (Busher 2015: 84). Learning was also highly collaborative with activists sharing content via the social network, Facebook (Busher 2015; cf. Bloom 2015, on ISIS's use of Telegram). Busher (2015: 91) suggested that the extent of permissiveness and inclusiveness in the EDL's ideological position was part of its attraction, in so far as it allowed activists to create their own ideological landscapes. In Christensen's (2015a) study

of far right extremists in Sweden, however, those in more diffuse groups who developed an interest in right wing ideas found themselves discontented: 'to become strongly ideologically convinced in a less organised group seems also to have the potential to make the individual give up on the group, because the rest of its members suddenly appear frivolous for the strongly ideologically convinced.' (Christensen 2015a: 62) These individuals often sought out other organisations with a stronger neo-Nazi ideological focus.

Ideological learning can also take place in isolation. Pearson (2016) described the case of Roshonara Choudhry, who was convicted for an attack on British Member of Parliament, Steven Timms. When questioned about the attack, Choudhry cited Anwar al-Awlaki as a source in her learning about Islam, the Qur'an, martyrdom and jihad (Dodd 2010). Pearson highlighted the gender issues that led Choudhry to focus on online material as a source of inspiration, as she was unable to access more conventional offline channels due to their positions on gender and the limitations of her own situation (Pearson 2016: 16). While critical of assumptions that Choudhry was 'brainwashed' by al-Awlaki, Pearson (2016) viewed the use of online material as a way for her to evade the gender restrictions common to the more overtly social forms of Islamist extremist or jihadist engagement.

Al-Awlaki's ability to draw young and often isolated people to jihadism was also discussed by Gendron (2017). She described the social and affective elements that contributed to his charismatic authority and hold over his audience, noting 'his exceptional religious knowledge as a writer on Islamic texts, his talent as a motivational speaker and effective communicator, and his "people" skills in terms of his ability to relate to other people' (Gendron 2017: 54; but see also Beekers 2015, on non-extremist Islamic preachers). With other extremist preachers, he advanced his message and exercised his authority online though a 'virtual knowledge bank' of online libraries and discussion forums, websites, blogs and multiple forms of social media (Gendron 2010: 55). These resources, Gendron (2010: 55) suggested, 'are especially useful to the small, self-directed and probably self-financed cells typical of the "leaderless" model of jihad'. Together they provide the medium for the circulation of jihadist propaganda, and the materials for autonomous and small group ideological learning from key authority figures. Exploitation of

this new medium by al-Awlaki and other ideologues is not unusual or surprising, however, as there is a long history of early and innovative use of new technologies and media by religious groups and exponents (Campbell 2010).

Roshonara Choudhry's use of the works of al-Awlaki online was educational and ideological, but also social in so far as it put her in contact with a teacher and scholar. As far as her testimony shows (Dodd 2010), however, the Internet did not fulfil an operational purpose for her in the planning of her attack.

Kenney (2010: 177), writing some years before the Choudhry case, focused explicitly on countering the 'conventional wisdom that the Internet is a reliable source of operational knowledge for terrorists'. The Internet was claimed by many in the field of terrorism studies to have 'replaced the need for physical training in urban warfare and terrorism' (Kenney 2010: 178). For a variety of reasons – including overload and poor reliability of information, and unsuitability of the medium for practical learning – Kenney (2010: 178) contended that these claims needed challenging. In doing so, he distinguished between two Greek terms, *techne* or abstract technical knowledge, and *mētis* or practical, experiential knowledge. According to Kenney (2010: 180-181), techne was similar in some ways to what learning theorists referred to as 'explicit knowledge': it was transmitted through language and artefacts, and taught as formal instruction. However, it differed in transcending both location and context. Mētis, closer to 'tacit knowledge', involved learning through repeated practice and the development of skills rather than formal study. It was locally-specific and situational. Unlike 'tacit knowledge', however, it was not intuitive but consciously pursued. Furthermore, it was fluid and adaptive.

> *While the Internet allows militants to share substantial techne, along with religious and ideological information, it is not particularly useful for disseminating the experiential and situational knowledge terrorists use to engage in acts of political violence […] its value as a source of operational knowledge of terrorism is limited. (Kenney 2010: 177)*

Terrorism scholars, Kenney suggested (2010: 181, 186), had failed to take note of these different types of knowledge, or of the necessity of practical know-how

and 'learning by doing' for those preparing to commit terrorist acts (but see Gill et al 2013).

Before concluding, it is important to note that the notion of situated learning in a community of practice is relevant not only to extremist organisations, but to those bodies that seek to offer extremists a way out, i.e. centres or programmes for de-radicalisation and disengagement from terrorism or violence. In her study of disengagement from the extreme right in Sweden, Christensen (2015a, 2015b, 2018) focused on the process of learning a new identity and worldview through participation and social interaction in the EXIT programme developed at Fryshuset, a youth centre in Stockholm. The programme had grown organically out of Fryshuset's cultural context, and its aim to be 'a place in which marginalised individuals would be mobilised and come to realise that negative experiences can be turned into positive strengths' (Carlberg, cited in Christensen 2015b: 98). Key to achieving this for young people seeking to exit far right organisations was the focus on coaching, that is, on using mentors who had themselves transitioned from extremist and sometimes criminal positions to new identities. Christensen noted that coaches underwent 'a reorientation',

> *a process of not only learning, but also of valuation and elevation – of their stories, their identity and their self-understanding […] Over time, when the figured world of Fryshuset comes to constitute the coaches' self-knowledge and frame of reality, the reorientation makes them categorise others in a different way and see their previous assumptions in a new light. (Christensen 2015b: 129)*

This placed the coaches in a position where they were able to offer an alternative, to engage and support EXIT's 'clients', as 'living proof that leaving the extremist right is possible' (Christensen 2018: 11). In due course, some of these clients would themselves have the opportunity to move to coaching roles.

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To conclude, the study of learning is diverse, largely divided between behaviourist and constructivist approaches. The smaller subfield of research on terrorist and extremist learning has concentrated more on operational learning than on ideological

transmission. Researchers have noted that terrorist groups learn about what works over time and from one another; they adjust their behaviours based on acquired knowledge. The trend towards researching participatory learning within communities of practice has been reflected within this subfield as well as within learning research more generally.

Accounts of learning inside extreme organisations suggest that approaches to ideological instruction are diverse. Some groups are highly centralised and controlled in their transmission processes; others exploit a cell-like structure to share knowledge and maintain commitment. Some groups – especially those that are more diffuse or informal – operate with more of a DIY ethos, although with some controls in place. There is also a question of self-learning. Although the boundaries of what defines a lone actor are fuzzy, individual examples provide evidence that autonomous ideological learning can take place.

What these differences show is that learning and the transmission of knowledge and skills (know-what and know-how), whether ideological or operational in kind, cannot be understood without reference to the nature of the social formation or community in question, its structure and organisational relationships. Tightly-knit groups, centralised and hierarchical bodies, diffuse street networks and online milieus all acquire and share ideas, beliefs, values and technical information in accordance with their social organisation and communications infrastructure. As researchers have shown, in addition to social context and interaction, embodied practice and emotional engagement are important for effective learning (and this is no less the case for extremist *disengagement*). And charisma, control and coercion too have a place in sustaining religious and political communities of practice, whether through horizontal peer-to-peer communications and coaching or top-down mechanisms.

4. LEARNING AND THE TRANSMISSION OF IDEOLOGY IN AL-MUHAJIROUN

The UK network of militant Islamists, known principally as al-Muhajiroun (AM), provides a useful case study of how organised political and religious groups seek to transmit ideology. Although now banned, the network was permitted to operate openly for an extended period. Researchers and journalists have had some success in gaining access to the network at various points, producing a modest amount of insightful literature on the group's activities. This case study initially outlines the background of AM, including its connections to several terrorist attacks. The case study then summarises available findings on the group's external recruitment as well as what is known about its internal workings, drawing on research by Wiktorowitz (2005), Kenney (2017), Kenney et al (2013), Pantucci (2010, 2015), Bailey (2017), Bowen (2014), O'Neill & McGrory (2006) and Raymond (2010).

4.1 BACKGROUND

Al-Muhajiroun was formed in the UK in 1996 by Omar Bakri Muhammad following his resignation from Hizb-ut-Tahrir (he had initially established AM in the 1980s in Saudi Arabia) (Pantucci 2010: 230-231; Pantucci 2015: 89-90). It adopted an extreme jihadist position and was at the violent end of the Salafi spectrum. The group voluntarily disbanded in 2004 to pre-empt an expected ban, and was eventually proscribed, under several different names, in 2010 (Yafai 2004; Home Office 2017). The group is currently proscribed in the UK under the following names: The Saved Sect, al-Muhajiroun, Islam4UK, Call to Submission, Islamic Path, London School of Sharia, Muslims Against Crusades, Al Ghurabaa, Need4Khilafah, the Shariah Project and the Islamic Dawah Association (Home Office 2017). It is illegal in the UK to belong, invite support for, organise

meetings for, or wear clothing or display articles indicating support for any of these groups (Home Office 2017).

Those involved with AM and its off-shoots have been connected to terrorist attacks globally, but these relationships are seldom straightforward. Al-Muhajiroun's links to terrorist violence (including near misses) include,

- 1998 Petrol bomb attack on a West London Territorial Army base carried out by AM member, Amer Mizra

- 2000 First record of a British citizen perpetrating a suicide attack, Mohammed Bilal, former pupil of Bakri

- 2003 Asif Hanif suicide attack, and failed suicide bomber, Omar Sharif, Tel -Aviv, both linked to AM

- 2004 Four of five plotting attacks on UK shopping centre and a night club were AM members

- 2010 A planned attack on the London Stock Exchange, one of the attackers, Mohammed Chowdhury, linked to AM

- 2013 Murder of Fusilier Lee-Rigby by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale; both attended AM events

- 2017 Vehicle and knife attack at Borough Market carried about by three men including Khuram Butt, reported as a follower of AM.

Ideologically, AM shared an Islamist ideology with Hizb-ut-Tahrir, combined with a Salafist theology (Bowen 2014; Kenney 2017: 4). Omar Bakri Muhammad was the movement's most important ideologue, and many of its beliefs were derived from his teachings (Kenney 2017: 4). AM differed from Hizb-ut-Tahrir in advocating for the imposition of *shari'ah* in Western countries as well as Muslim-majority ones (Pantucci 2015: 116). It expressed antagonistic views towards non-Muslims and those it saw as apostates, and encouraged followers to travel abroad to train and fight in conflicts (Bowen 2014: 67; Pantucci 2015: 153).

Omar Bakri Muhammad left the UK for Lebanon in 2005 under government pressure following the 7/7 attacks. He was banned from returning. The loss of Bakri and increased pressure from the authorities impacted heavily on the group. Although some prominent members were able to able to travel and

meet with Bakri, social network analysis, combined with interview data, suggests that the network was forced to shrink and isolate itself (Kenney et al 2013: 746). However, despite these losses, the group showed significant adaptability, both in reconfiguring itself to get around legal pressures, and in maintaining connections to Bakri through online tools, whilst veteran members simultaneously took a greater role (Kenney et al 2013: 746; Pantucci 2015).

Also instrumental in the running of al-Muhajiroun was Anjem Choudary, who took over the group after Bakri left (Pantucci 2010: 240). Choudary continued the trend of provocation, taking part in a debate on the US TV channel, Fox News, with extreme right-wing counter-jihad activist Pamela Geller, in the aftermath of an attack on a conference featuring a 'Draw Mohammed' cartoon contest in 2015 (Alexander 2015). British-born Choudary was imprisoned in 2016 for supporting a proscribed organisation – ISIS – in a series of talks posted on YouTube (Dodd 2017).

4.2 EXTERNAL TRANSMISSION

Despite its fringe status, al-Muhajiroun was never shy about communicating its beliefs externally. Its deliberate public provocations received widespread media attention (Bailey 2017). A planned conference at the London Arena in 1996 resulted in more than 600 media enquiries, provoked questions to be asked in the House of Commons and international outrage from Egypt (Jury 1996). A 2003 conference organised by AM was titled the 'Magnificent 19', a reference to the nineteen perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. Subsequently, the group tried to organise protests against UK involvement in Afghanistan in Wootton Bassett under the name Islam 4 UK (Raymond 2010).

Bakri and his network actively engaged with journalists to promote their cause. Bakri acquired the nickname the 'Tottenham Ayatollah' after appearing in a 1997 documentary made by Jon Ronson (Pantucci 2010). During the documentary Bakri was revealed to maintain a collection of press clippings on a 'media onslaught against Islam wall'. Ronson's documentary presented Bakri as a fantasist bumbler: Bakri's extremist material was photocopied at a branch of *Office World* in North London, and a protest outside the Israeli embassy goes awry when Bakri receives the wrong address from Directory Enquiries. In the

documentary, Ronson (who is Jewish) was open about his own disquiet in being co-opted by Bakri, for example by acting as his driver. Subsequently, Bakri reportedly claimed to have recruited Asif Sadiq (Mohammed Bilal), the first documented UK suicide bomber, who blew himself up in Kashmir in 2000 (Pantucci 2010: 232; Pantucci 2015: 153). In 2006 Bakri also claimed that Omar Sharif, who was found dead after a failed suicide attack in Tel Aviv in 2003, had been a pupil (Pantucci 2010: 234).

Al-Muhajiroun supporters continued to engage in activism through protest, and through street stalls and public engagement (Kenney 2017; Bailey 2017). The researcher, Gavin Bailey, noted that he made contact with the group at a public event in 2009 which featured Anjem Choudary as a speaker. Bailey (2017) observed the group handing out material and engaging the public through street stalls, and noted that the AM leadership was always careful to remain just within the law. As he subsequently argued, their activities almost certainly contributed to government attempts to expand definitions of extremism and to renewing commitment to British values (Bailey 2017).

Accounts of al-Muhajiroun network activities in the UK give some insight into how the group sought to recruit new supporters. First-hand research with AM reemphasised that the group was not clandestine, but instead sought publicity. Bailey (2017) noted that stories were designed to provoke outrage and recruit new activists, even when proposed marches and conferences did not take place. He acknowledged that several AM activists went on to commit terrorist offences, but also stressed the complexities of dealing with those on the fringes of violence:

> *'It's possible that some had an interest in committing future violence before getting involved, hence the attraction of the group, and some may have developed it during or after involvement.' (Bailey 2017)*

In 2002, following a vetting interview with Omar Bakri Muhammad, US-based researcher Quintan Wiktorowicz conducted ethnographic fieldwork with AM supporters in the UK. This included thirty interviews, and additional unstructured conversations, as well as observations of meetings, lessons and events (Wiktorowicz 2005: 32). Describing the process of joining AM, Wiktorowicz (2005: 85) argued that the

role of external communication was to induce a sense of 'crisis and urgency'. In conversations with potential recruits, activists depicted a Muslim community under threat and requiring immediate action from supporters. This occurred both through the movement's outward-facing activities, and through personal contact with activists. Wiktorowicz (2005) recognised that the majority who encountered this message ignored it, but, for a small number, the messages spread by AM resulted in a 'cognitive opening' and in some cases, where existing religious structures were found wanting, 'religious seeking' behaviours (Wiktorowicz 2005: 85). Identity crisis was the dominant recruitment mode for AM, he suggested, with university students and recent graduates born in the UK of South Asian descent being a prime constituency (Wiktorowicz 2005: 91).

4.3 INTERNAL TRANSMISSION

Internally, AM has been understood as a 'community of practice'. Based on field research, Kenney (2017) argued that, whilst the literature had focused heavily on the outcomes of terrorist learning, it was crucial to understand the *process* of learning itself (Kenney 2017: 14). He described AM as:

> *a community of practice whose participants learn from each other by sharing their knowledge and performing their activism. At the heart of this community are the interactions between novices and veterans. Newcomers learn the community's norms and practices through repeated engagement with more experienced activists. (Kenney 2017: 14)*

Kenney (2017) noted a number of features that pointed towards the communal nature of learning in AM. First, there was a pathway for new adherents to the group. After joining, new recruits progressed from being novices to more developed practitioners of AM's ideology. This was done informally. Novices were largely responsible for seeking out their own mentors within the group (Kenney 2017: 4). Also important were more formalised relationships with instructors who often toured the country giving lectures (Kenney 2017: 4). Kenney noted the progression of some members to the status of instructor, arguing that this contributed to the group's resilience following

the loss of Bakri, the group's ideological leader (Kenney 2017: 5). This demonstrated not only the possibility of progression for new recruits, but also the intergenerational aspects of transmission, with newly schooled recruits stepping in to replace lost veterans.

The role of *suhba*, learning by companionship, observed within AM, gives some insight into the extension of communities of practice beyond practical and operational knowledge. The activists Kenney (2017: 6) spoke to saw shadowing an established practitioner as a chance to learn skills not available through the classroom. These interactions were also observed to build group solidarity (Kenney 2017: 6). Kenney also noted the involvement of new activists in practical activities, such as protest and street propaganda (Kenney 2017: 7). There was little formal training, with activists being thrown in at the deep end. Participation in protest activity, reported to be very intimidating by Kenney, was a baptism of fire and test of loyalty for new recruits. Although the practical skills and know-how gained through community approaches were deemed important, this kind of activism also needed to be supported by ideological knowledge. This was delivered through *halaqahs* or formalised study groups (Kenney 2017: 8).

Al-Muhajiroun activists were also observed to reflect on their experiences. Kenney (2017: 9) reported regular meetings at which activists met to discuss issues and reflect on their performance, described as a process of accounting. There was also an informal level of critical discussion conducted outside meetings (Kenney 2017: 10). However, critical reflection was heavily constrained by ideological dogma and largely limited to minor disputes and practicalities. The ideological message was held up as unimpeachable.

> *Any compromising of the network's ideology and vision is unacceptable to activists. After all, their activism is "a complete way of life," as another respondent puts it. (Kenney 2017:11)*

For Kenney (2017: 12), this was a limitation, forcing AM into a self-contained network fearful of outside ideological influences, thereby constraining the potential for learning, and leading to factionalism. This was borne out by the dispute which erupted over a lecture invitation to Anwar al-Awlaki by one study group which then escalated into a leadership crisis and

resulted in a split. Kenney (2017: 13) also observed an acceptance of pre-determinism among activists – God had already willed what would happen – and this added further to limiting learning and adaptation.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

Al-Muhajiroun, in its many incarnations, had a lasting influence on the UK jihadist scene. Although the group always operated as a radical milieu rather than a coordinated terror organisation, its connections to militant Islamist violence in the UK cannot be ignored. Al-Muhajiroun's activities contributed to shaping the ongoing debate about the line between violent and non-violent extremism.

Among its many facets, ideological transmission, both external and internal, was a core feature of AM. This was evident in the group's incessant publicity-seeking, its eagerness to engage with journalists (and to some extent academics), and its use of public protests and street stalls. As Wiktorowicz (2005) observed, the intent of these activities was to instil in the receptive a sense of grievance and crisis.

Internal ideological transmission was by no means a one-time event. Al-Muhajiroun sought to work with its activists to develop their ideological knowledge. Alongside the formal teaching of new recruits by leaders, informal learning – through a 'community of practice' – was a key component of instruction. Whilst continued adherence to Bakri's ideological teachings limited the potential for the group to develop and expand its connections, it nevertheless proved resilient. Even as leadership figures were removed from the network, ideologically developed activists stepped in to continue the struggle.

5. CONCLUSION

The earlier reviews – on families and peer-to-peer communication – focused primarily on habitual and tacit forms of ideological transmission. However, while much of our ideological make-up may be acquired unselfconsciously through socialisation, nurture and peer relationships, there are many occasions on which deliberate attempts are made to influence us and shape our ideas, beliefs and values, not least of all by political and religious groups. Using communications strategies designed to engage, persuade and sometimes recruit outsiders, and to instruct insiders and bind them collectively, such groups make use of a wide array of media and messages in accordance with their mission and its intended audience.

The starting point for this review has been propaganda. Although the concept of propaganda seized the collective imagination in the aftermath of the First World War, the limitations of heavily-centralised, state-based propaganda campaigns as explanations for ideological transmission are readily apparent. While propaganda could exploit pre-existing sentiment, there was much to limit a propagandist who attempted to suggest an entirely novel course of thought. The concept of propaganda became even more limited as technical and social change began to challenge existing monopolies on information provision. In some respects, despite a renewed interest in recent years, propaganda has grown almost too ubiquitous to be a useful concept.

Fresh insight into the role of communication in mobilising collective action has come from studies of social movement mobilisations. Alongside the right political opportunities and available resources, mobilisations depend on finding compelling ways to enthuse supporters, highlighting ideologically convenient facts while skating over those that contradict ideologically supported positions. Framing theory recognises that audiences have some leeway in selecting their own frames for interpreting common information. A successful mobilisation then rests not on the control of information, but on influencing how audiences interpret it. Framing theory has been applied extensively to violence in social movements where it has served to bridge rational and emotional accounts of violent mobilisations.

Aside from external communications, purposeful ideological transmission also takes place internally within organisations and movements. Both new adherents and movement stalwarts are potentially exposed to ideological learning within extremist political and religious organisations. However, much of the available theory does not focus on learning and extremism, but instead comes from management and educational perspectives. The concept of the learning within organisations, and the battles for ideological control that can take place within them, for example provide fruitful insights for terrorism studies. The theory of 'communities of practice' has been employed frequently in relation to the analysis of political and religious groups.

Research specifically focused on learning within terrorist and extremist organisations has tended to be directed to operational rather than ideological learning, leaving room for future research on the latter. Irrespective of such limitations, available research has shown a variety of approaches to learning in operation within extremist groups, including directed and supervised courses, group learning, shadowing, learning by doing, and independent study.

Ideological transmission by and within organisations is a multifaceted process. Even notionally clandestine organisations attempt to raise awareness and support for a cause. Where these appeals resonate with beliefs and values already held by an audience, or they can be made to, ideological change may occur. However, achieving this level of influence is contingent on either avoiding or overturning already held contradictory beliefs. Persuading newcomers to support or join a religious or political movement is no easy matter, and the failure rate is likely to be high except in those cases where there is already a significant match between existing beliefs and those held by the group. Furthermore, as a result of technological and social change, attempts at ideologically persuasive communication are increasingly in competition with other organisations' narratives and frames.

Once individuals are sufficiently engaged to make contact with a group, their experience is likely to vary hugely depending on both its structure and purpose. In some cases, ideological learning may be centrally planned, well-organised, actively taught, and socially

reinforced; in others, participants may be left to find their own way, through networking and autonomous learning. Power structures within groups, the charisma of leaders, relationships between members (and with outsiders), and the use of befriending and 'love-bombing' also have an impact on enculturation and the readiness of individuals to adopt a group's ideology.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

This is the third report in a series of synthetic reviews on ideological transmission produced by Kim Knott and Benjamin Lee from the *Ideas, Beliefs And Values In Social Context* CREST programme.

Where and how are extremist ideologies transmitted and young people radicalised? This programme of research improves our understanding of where and how extremist ideologies are transmitted and young people are radicalised, in order for de-radicalisation strategies and counter-narratives to be better designed and targeted. It is led by Professor Kim Knott at Lancaster University.

Through original research, knowledge synthesis and transfer – including workshops and roundtables, the programme aims to improve understanding of the conditions under which extremist ideologies are transmitted, individuals and groups are radicalised, and a minority make the move to violence.

Better knowledge of the process, locations, events and relationships involved in ideological transmission is vital for future development and targeting of interventions, disruption, and counter-narratives.

OUTPUTS

The first report in the series, *The Family And Ideological Transmission*, focuses on the family as a context for ideological transmission, and includes case studies on extremism and terrorism.

The second report, *Peers, Education and Prisons*, focuses on peer-to-peer relationships as a context for ideological transmission, particularly in the context of education and prisons.

The Ideas, Beliefs And Values In Social Context programme has also produced an array of guides, such as *Understanding the far-right landscape* and *Sunni And Shi'a Islam: Differences And Relationships*

You can find all the reports, guides, articles and other outputs from this programme here:

www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/ideas-beliefs-values

For more information on CREST
and other CREST resources, visit
www.crestresearch.ac.uk

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18-040-01